

Perfections of Grace:

Comparisons & Contrasts of Old Baptist Doctrine & Calvinism

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INTRODUCTION

It is a well-established fact that most Baptists of the past were Calvinistic; however, their brand of Calvinism was not necessarily the same as that of conventional Calvinists. The primary purpose of this book is to document and explain these differences, and to offer a scriptural defense for the positions taken by Primitive Baptists, Regular Baptists and Particular Baptists on the points at issue. The book especially focuses on Primitive Baptists because: a) This is what I have been for 60 years, b) Primitive Baptists defend themselves as being the primary modern-day descendents of the other Baptists named, or at least in America, and c) They are the most misunderstood and misrepresented of the group. However, the book extensively quotes and analyzes all these Baptists, who sometimes stood resolutely with conventional Calvinists against opposition by their own Baptist cohorts, and at other times took positions that differed from what most Calvinists believe. It is important to understand that these differences were on peripheral points of that doctrine, albeit ones that should be considered significant.

All of these Baptists are (or were) definitely Calvinists under the broad definition of the term. The well known five-point paradigm commonly used to identify Calvinism is resolutely affirmed by them. However, they prefer not to be called “Calvinists,” partly because they deny that their doctrine originated with Calvin, and partly because they are convicted about their differences from most Calvinists on issues considered in this book. The traditional Baptist attitude towards the term “Calvinism” was well-expressed by the historian David Benedict in his Fifty Years Among the Baptists. His description of Baptists around the year 1800 still pertains:

In my early day the Associated Baptists were all professedly Calvinistic in their doctrinal sentiments. The term, however, was not agreeable to many, as they did not subscribe to all the sentiments of John Calvin, but they submitted to it for distinction sake, and in contradistinction from those whose views were less orthodox on Predestination, etc. – (p 103-104).

Because of differences these Baptists have or had from other Calvinists, they have been labeled “hyper-Calvinists” by some of their critics. This is especially true of Primitive Baptists. This term has always been used as a pejorative to insinuate extremism, but it truly has no definite meaning. Indeed, in recent decades it has commonly been used by pseudo-Calvinists against men who were simply Calvinists. Under this ridiculous definition, John Calvin himself was a hyper-Calvinist. Under more traditional definitions of the term, Primitive Baptists would qualify in some respects but not in others. The term “hypo-Calvinist” might actually better describe them on a few points. However, the remainder of this book will show that neither term truly fits.

Since I have no convenient term like “Calvinism” to describe Primitive Baptist doctrine, my habit in this book is to simply refer to it as the latter, though it was also believed by their Regular Baptist predecessors in America, and, for the most part, by their Particular Baptist predecessors in England. So my term “Primitive” could also be taken as “primitive,” i.e. as an adjective (meaning “original”) rather than part of a name. Also, on any given point of doctrine, one could find men of other Baptists and even non-Baptists who took or take the same point of view. Scholars of all types will be supportively quoted in this book.

Primitive Baptists are like most Baptists in that they consider their churches to be independent bodies. This means they are not officially bound to any common creed. So when I speak of “Primitive Baptist doctrine,” I mean what they *generally* believe and have generally believed over their history. I acknowledge that some of past and present may have taken different positions. Also, there are several disconnected bodies that go by the name “Primitive Baptist.” A few of these may have doctrines significantly differing from what is defended in this book, but these would be of a minority view. Readers should be aware that many misrepresentations have been made of Primitive Baptists in published literature, including even purportedly scholarly works. *Many* of these have been shockingly inaccurate.

I give similar precautions concerning my use of the term “Calvinist.” I use the word to mean *typical* Calvinists. While this book considers points of difference from typical Calvinists, some who consider themselves Calvinists will resolutely agree with Primitive Baptists on such points. There are also points where typical Calvinists are resolutely defended, particularly on issues where they are contested by Arminians and semi-Arminians. I hope that my use of this term will not unnecessarily offend. Most Christians do not care to have their doctrines named after men, so I assume that few will object to my use of the label “Calvinist.”

In the 19th century, there was a radical shift among Baptist towards Arminianism, to the extent that true Calvinists became difficult to find among them in America apart from Primitive Baptists. Even where other Baptists claimed to be Calvinistic, a great number of them were actually advocating a pseudo-Calvinism known as “Fullerism.” More will be said about this in a later chapter. In the last few decades, the trend has reversed, so that large numbers of Baptists are now gravitating back towards Calvinism. Since the Primitive Baptists are the oldest strain of Calvinistic Baptists in America, many newcomers to Calvinism, including even Primitive Baptist youth, are apt to walk the same road as the Primitive Baptists of the past, experiencing and enduring the same challenges and issues. My hope is that this book will prove helpful to them. Also, in process of explaining and defending peripheral points of Calvinism, it usually becomes necessary to explain and defend the basic points of Calvinism itself. So the book should prove useful even to those who are unresolved on issues that distinguish Calvinists from Arminians.

THE ROOT PRINCIPLES OF CALVINISM

In this chapter I will consider doctrines where Primitive Baptists have resolutely defended Calvinism, though preferring to call these the “doctrines of grace.” These are the well-known five basic points of that doctrine, commonly expressed with the acronym TULIP:

- 1) Total depravity of man, meaning that man, being fallen in Adam, is dead spiritually, and so incapable of contributing toward his own spiritual birth.
- 2) Unconditional election, meaning those who will finally be saved were chosen by God to that end, and this choice was not based upon any obedience foreseen in them.
- 3) Limited and effectual atonement, meaning that Christ died for the salvation of the elect only, and that His death met or ensured all conditions to its designed end.
- 4) Irresistible Grace, meaning that all of the elect will be irresistibly quickened, or born again, by a sovereign operation of the Holy Spirit.
- 5) Preservation, meaning that all who are born again will be finally saved to heaven.

Except for one bizarre case to be considered later, these five points almost always accompany one another in practice. If a man believes in some of them, he is almost sure to believe in all of them. The reason is that these points are more of a sequence in thought than five independent ideas. This also implies they are not truly the root principles of Calvinism. Disputants might get entangled in the five points when they should have focused on the true heart of the matter.

To arrive at Calvinism, a Christian merely needs to begin with proper concept of man or a proper concept of God. If he starts with a proper concept of man, his sequence of thought will invariably carry him to Calvinism. The same will be true if he starts with a proper concept of God. In the two remaining sections of this chapter, I will build up the defining points of Calvinism using both approaches, and will show in process that the real issues between Calvinism and Arminianism are even greater than they appear.

The Doctrines of Grace Were Implied in Eden

The first simple point from which Calvinism derives is the oldest and most consequential issue in history. It was the substance of the very first religious debate. God told Adam, *“Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,”* (Gn 2:16-17). The Devil disputed this point, saying, *“Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil,”* (Gn 3:4-5). With these conflicting words, the first of all religious disputes was born, and for the first time ever, the human mind was presented with the challenge of discerning between a religious truth and a religious lie. It is a remarkable thing that thousands of years later, the very same issue in this original debate lives on in the conflict between Calvinism and Arminianism.

The Devil’s argument was built upon the following ideas: First, that there is a higher knowledge of an esoteric nature which, if properly understood, would lead to a different interpretation of what God said than would be implied by simple, logical meaning. This remains an argument of some misguided Christians today, including especially the pseudo-Calvinists to be considered in

the next chapter. Second, the Devil argued there are actions which men can undertake via their freewill and ability whereby they can “open their eyes” and elevate themselves to a higher capacity of learning, thereby enabling themselves to understand what only God would otherwise know. This argument is a prime feature of Arminianism, which builds almost its entire case around the idea that fallen man, by his own choice, can attain spirituality, thereby bringing himself nearer to the state of God. It is also an argument having a striking similarity to the doctrine of evolution, which helps explain why so many have been duped by it. The Devil has been duping men with this argument from the beginning, and judging from his own irrational actions, it appears the Devil has even managed to dupe himself with it (Isa 14:13-14). The third point is the most consequential of all and is necessary to sustain the second. It is that the word “die” in God’s commandment does not carry with it the gravity or dire implications it would typically import, and that it is particularly misleading for purposes of describing the actual state of things on the *very day* wherein Adam transgressed. Now this is the single, simple point where the numerous issues between Calvinism and Arminianism converge. Exactly what did God mean by the word “die” in His warning to Adam?

In denying that man would die on the very day he ate the forbidden fruit, the Devil would have been mostly truthful if “die” were taken to mean only *bodily* death. Adam lived *bodily* long after his transgression. The Lord obviously intended something else by the word. The Devil is of course very subtle. There can be a surprising amount of truth in what he has to say, but always laced with a tincture of toxin. The toxin is oftentimes administered through play on a word. The first play ever was on the word “die.”

It truly meant more than *bodily* death. It meant something even more severe, producing a condition of which *bodily* death is a mere symptom. The consequences of this death are clearly set forth throughout scripture. It rendered man corrupt and unfit for heaven: “*Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption,*” (1Cor 15:50). It rendered man absolutely averse to all that is spiritual: “*But the natural man 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,*” (1Cor 2:14). This being the case, it rendered man incapable of pleasing God: “*Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God,*” (Rom 8:7-8). It rendered man incapable of coming to Christ: “*No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day,*” (Jn 6:44). Accordingly, it deadened the eyes and ears of man to the word of God: “*Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word,*” (Jn 8:43). “*For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God,*” (1Cor 1:18). This disability is absolute and complete. When God told Adam he would “die,” He meant nothing less, and logic disallows anything more.

Death is neither a mere sickness nor a partial disability. The word “die” would be an exaggeration of these states, and in that event, the Devil would have had a reasonable basis for objecting to the term. The severity of the word is corroborated in every scripture quoted in the prior paragraph, all of which affirm a state of *absolute* corruption and spiritual inability. Natural man does not merely find spiritual things to be challenging; rather, he absolutely will not receive them. He does not hear God’s word because he *cannot* hear it. The carnal mind is not merely

prone to disobey God. It is at absolute enmity against God. God does not merely find occasional disappointment in the carnal mind; rather, it is something that absolutely cannot please Him. Fallen man is not merely distracted and deterred from God; rather, he absolutely cannot come to Him except he be drawn by God Himself. And indeed, in countless other texts describing the carnal state of man, one will find his corruption and spiritual inability being consistently and emphatically stated in terms that are *absolute* (Gn 6:5, Gn 8:21, Job 14:4, 15:14-16, 25:4-6, Ps 51:5, 58:3, Eccl 7:20, Isa 64:6, Mt 12:33-35, 19:17, Jn 5:25, 8:34, 10:26, Rom 3:10-18, 5:12, 6:16-18, 7:14-24, 1Cor 1:18, Eph 2:1, Col 1:21, 2:13, Php 3:3). Anyone who charges these texts with exaggeration has taken up fellowship with the Devil. His first lie asserted exactly the same.

The severity of this death may also be inferred from the remedy, which is not a mere elixir nor a therapy nor a change of diet or habit nor even a religious ritual. Rather, it is the radical measure of a *new birth*. The state of disrepair was such that there is nothing to do but start afresh. By using the analogy of a birth, the Bible forcefully conveys the extent of inability in fallen man. No man has ever contributed to his own physical birth, nor could he do so. Accordingly, no man has ability to contribute to his own spiritual birth. Natural birth is something every man has experienced, so every man should know these things to be true. But to ensure that the point is not missed, the same inability is conveyed by *every* other analogy the Bible uses to describe the acquisition of spiritual life. In particular, it is compared to a *birth* (Jn 3:3-5), a *quickening* (Eph 2:1), a *resurrection* (Jn 5:25), a *translation* (Col 1:12-13) and a *creation* (Eph 2:10, 2Cor 5:17). All these analogies imply man is passive in it, which is the logical consequence of the fact that his fallen state has produced absolute inability in respect to spiritual things.

Contrast these scriptural analogies with the common Arminian analogy that correctly begins with the claim that spiritual life is a gift, but then qualifies this by adding that the duty of faith is the “hand” that receives the gift. Now this popular analogy using the hand has neither scriptural precedent nor basis, and is contradicted by every analogy the Bible actually uses. It is also absurd. Only an insane man would say to a corpse, “Stretch out your hand and I will give you life.” The analogy implicitly denies what God told Adam and affirms the words of Satan. If God is true, then both Adam and all who descended from him are *dead* (Rom 5:12, 1Cor 15:22).

Every time we agonize at the sight of a corpse, there is a stark reminder of the gravity of death. It is the consummate state of irrecoverable helplessness and hopelessness. For this reason it is our supreme fear. When Adam was warned he would “die,” God surely intended to emphasize in the greatest conceivable way the severity of the consequences. To any reasonable mind, the divine warning communicated the idea that the calamity would be irrecoverable, absolute and complete. Death cannot mean anything else. Further, God has required every man of every generation to confront and experience death so that there can be no denial by any reasonable mind as to what He meant by the word in His warning to Adam. Salvation from death can only be accomplished by resurrection. Resurrection can only be accomplished by God. Nothing resurrected has ever contributed in the least to its resurrection. It is the consummate act of grace.

Knowing that many men would remain deluded by Satan even after all these considerations, God conveyed the same message in yet another powerful way. For over a thousand years, He imposed upon Israel a regime of religion that was radical in that it demanded obedience to a law that no man would prove able to keep. Why would God do such a thing? Is He unreasonable?

We need not speculate about the answers to these questions. The Bible plainly addresses them. The Law was given to demonstrate human corruption and inability, and therefore to prove to man that he was in fact *dead* in trespasses and sins, exactly as God said He would be (Rom 3:10-20, 7:1-13, 2Cor 3:7-8, Gal 3:21-24, Heb 10:1-3).

Notwithstanding all God has said and done, the original satanic lie is still endorsed, to some degree or another, by the delusions of Arminianism. This doctrine has no recourse but to contend that, insofar as corruption and inability are concerned, the death Adam experienced was not absolute. This is because all Arminian systems are built around the idea that salvation ultimately hinges on the decision of man, from which it follows that his corruption and inability cannot be complete. Any claim that man can make a decision to deliver himself from a state of death contradicts the very definition of death and therefore denies it. Now when Calvinism says man is totally depraved, this is neither more nor less than an affirmation of what God said to Adam, and is a denial of all satanic effort, both then and now, to minimize the severity of the word “die.” The critical nature of this difference cannot be overemphasized, because if “death” does not mean death, then how could we know that “life” means life?

These facts give strong justification to those who object to the term “Calvinism.” This term obscures a very crucial fact that God would have all men to know: The issues at stake here are not merely the substance of a theological debate between Calvin and Arminius, nor between Augustine and Pelagius, nor even between the Apostles and the Pharisees. Rather, this is a dispute between the Devil and God Himself. It is the oldest religious debate in the world. On one side of the dispute we have Devil doctrine, and on the other we have not “Calvinism,” but what is properly called “divine doctrine” or “Bible doctrine” or “Christian doctrine” or, as Primitive Baptists have affectionately called it, the “doctrines of grace.”

Once the word of the Lord to Adam is fully acknowledged, and any amendment offered by Satan fully rejected, the divine doctrines of grace readily fall into place. To say that man is totally depraved is simply to say he is dead. A dead man can only be made alive by an irresistible operation of the Holy Spirit. Because the man is absolutely corrupt, this operation is entirely by grace. Because the man is dead, and therefore unable to comply with any means to his own quickening, it must be an immediate work of the Holy Spirit alone. Hence, we are led to the principles of irresistible grace and immediate regeneration. Further, a man who is dead in corruption would never choose for this grace, so it follows that the choice was made by God. This is the principle of election. Since the matter is both initiated and completed by divine choice and action, it can only be terminated by the same. Its perpetuation is therefore as sure as the unchangeableness of God’s mind and the greatness of His power. This is the principle of preservation. Finally, since we are to glory in nothing but the cross of Jesus Christ our Lord (Gal 6:14), and since all spiritual blessings are in Him alone (Eph 1:3, Col 1:19, 2:10, 2Pet 1:3), it follows that all these things were acquired by His death, and since these things are collectively sufficient for salvation, it follows that His death must be effectual and sufficient to the same. Thus, all of the doctrines of grace are implied by the simple principle in God’s word to Adam.

Since Arminianism does not understand death, neither does it understand life. Where life is present, it manifests itself in vital activities. Breath, heartbeat, sight, hearing, etc. are the manifestations of life, not the causes of it. And those conditions proposed by Arminianism for

obtaining life are in fact the manifestations of it. Adherents to the doctrines of grace do not deny the salvation of any true believer in Christ, nor of anyone who obeys Christ with true love, nor of anyone who has been baptized in true conviction. But these things are no more the prerequisites of spiritual life than the breath, heartbeat, etc. are the prerequisites of natural life. They are *manifestations* of life in either case. They are the means by which a man is known to be alive, not by which he becomes such.

Yet it is important that he know these things. The prisoner is not truly free until he is told of his freedom to go. In his own mind, he is still a prisoner. When the debts of a man have been paid by another, he remains a debtor in his mind, and remains under the burden of it, until he is told of his freedom. Accordingly, the gospel, or “good news,” proclaims to believers that the prison doors are unlocked and they are free to go. Their debt has been paid. Most importantly, the gospel informs them as to who paid their debt and liberated them, by which they are to give glory to God through their Lord Jesus Christ. Hence, the gospel is blessed with the honor of directly addressing the ultimate end of all salvation, namely, that Jesus Christ be praised. It is therefore our privilege and obligation to “*..teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you,*” (Mt 28:19-20).

The Doctrines of Grace Are Implied by the Love of God

When Adam and his posterity fell in sin, there was no hope for them whatsoever apart from the love of God. This brings us to the second simple principle from which the doctrines of grace can be derived. The word “love” provides the bedrock for all salvation. The meaning of this word must be understood. If it is perverted, the doctrinal consequences are as pervasive as when “die” is perverted. The highest biblical meaning of “love” is “to sacrifice oneself for another.” “*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends,*” (Jn 15:13). This meaning is confirmed by our consciences. Most importantly, it is implied by our mental image of Jesus bleeding and dying on the cross. “*Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins,*” (1Jn 4:10). The word does not mean “to sacrifice oneself for the worthy” nor “to sacrifice oneself for what shall become worthy.” Such definitions would imply doom for all. Nor does it mean “to give everyone a chance,” though this is the way Arminianism frequently defines it. The word means to sacrifice oneself for another, whether worthy or not, and this is what it has ever been and what it will always be. It meant this before the foundation of the world when the concept was known only to God. It meant this when Jesus Christ died for His people. And the crucial point is this: It means exactly the same thing to Jesus now that it meant then, and it will mean this to Him in ages to come. Were this not so, Jesus would cease to be Jesus. But the Bible assures us this will never be, for He is “*Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever,*” (Heb 13:8).

So Jesus is the same person today as He was on the cross, and the love He had then He still has now. His love was such then that it moved Him to come down from heaven and sacrifice Himself for His people. At this present moment, His love is no less, and it is impossible that it could be any more. Nor can it be anything different. The definition of love precludes any possibility of it perishing or changing. This fact is confirmed by the Bible. Hence, Christ stands as ready to die for His people now as He did then, and this would be so even if they were to sink

into hell. “*For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed,*” (Mal 3:6). He is an unchangeable God, so whatever He loves He has *forever* loved, and whatever He loves He will *forever* love.

Arminian doctrine must deny this. It argues that God loves all men and that Christ died for all men. These are claims having appeal to many people, but the same claims become very odious when the whole of the matter is considered. These claims cannot be reconciled with the eternal and unchangeable love of God. This doctrine argues that Jesus loves even him who will finally be damned, but this love abruptly ceases when the sinner dies. Surely we cannot say that Christ loves those who are in hell without totally corrupting the meaning of “love.” The scriptures plainly declare the damned to be under indignation, wrath, tribulation and anguish (Rom 2:8,9). They are punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of God (2Thes 1:9). They are the subjects of the eternal vengeance of fire (2Thes 1:8, Jude 1:7). So we must conclude that if Arminianism is true, then the love of God *cannot* be eternal. It must be at least as transient as natural life itself. So anything that could be said concerning the durability of one could also be said for the durability of the other. Thus, we would be constrained to say the love of God is potentially but a vapor that appears for a little time and vanishes away (Js 4:14). We would also have to say the love of God is potentially but grass, and its glory as the flower of the grass. The love may wither and the flower of it may pass away (1Pet 1:24). These are monstrous claims, but what else can be concluded if Arminianism is true?

If Arminianism is correct in its implication that the love of God can be lost, then one must question the reasonableness of hoping for the salvation of *anyone*. Though heaven will be a far better place than earth, men will be in the hands of God there even as they are here. They will be upheld by the love of God there even as here. So if there is some possibility that the love of God can be lost, what basis is there for the claim that life in heaven is surely eternal? It is an unquestioned rule of reason that any possibility becomes a certainty in sufficient time, so in eternity any possibility must become reality. If the Devil and his angels fell from their first estate, then this must be possible for glorified men also, unless they are secured by the eternal love of God. So if anyone finds fault with the doctrines of grace because they affirm that God loves the elect only, and that Christ died for the elect only, let these objectors consider that such affirmations are merely restatements of the fact that God’s love is eternal, and if this were not so, then eternal salvation for anyone would be a myth.

No thought could occasion more despair than to conceive of God as being no better than ourselves. The love of men too often perishes. This is because men improperly define love to mean “sacrifice oneself for the worthy,” so when men cease to find worthiness, they often cease to love. Hence, men divorce their wives, and women forsake even their own children. But the Bible commands, “*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it, That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,*” (Eph 5:25-26). Observe He did not love the church because she was cleansed; rather, He cleansed her because He loved her. In the mind of Christ, love means “sacrifice oneself for another.” It does not mean “sacrifice oneself for the worthy.” This means true love must be eternal. As Isaiah said of God, “*Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee,*” (Isa 49:15).

Our hope of salvation rests upon the belief that God's love is defined as "sacrifice oneself for another" and that it is everlasting, as implied by this definition. Such belief is also our inspiration to love in a more perfect way. This hope and inspiration is as sure as God Himself. *"The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee,"* (Jer 31:3). Arminianism denies this, and does so under the pretext of exalting the love of God. Such pretensions are to be expected of a doctrine under the delusions of a deceitful snake. Yet the eternal love of Christ embraces multitudes who have been deceived by it. If this were not so, none could have any hope at all.

When the doctrines of grace claim that God elected a people, this is simply another way of saying that His love is everlasting. As soon as His love was fixed on any man, this man was elected for all practical purposes. Because this love was fixed before the foundation of the world, all embraced within it were predestined unto everything this love implied. This meant that Christ would surely sacrifice Himself for them. *"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins,"* (1Jn 4:10). It now means that all embraced within this love will surely be drawn to God. *"We love him, because he first loved us,"* (1Jn 4:19). *"Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee,"* (Jer 31:3). It means those embraced within this love can never fall from salvation. To assert such a thing is to deny the meaning of love. It means "sacrifice oneself for another." It does not mean "sacrifice oneself for the worthy." If any were to fall away, Christ would surely die for them again. He is *"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever"* (Heb 13:8), and He promised, *"I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed,"* (Mal 3:6). So the doctrines of grace are built upon the sure foundation of the eternal and unchangeable love of God. Arminianism has argued against this for as long as the world has stood, *"Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity,"* (2Tim 2:19).

So in all of these things Primitive Baptists heartily endorse and encourage Calvinists. Yet these truths have no dependence upon John Calvin. He is to be commended for understanding them and for having the courage to teach them, but the doctrine is as old as eternity. Accordingly, Arminianism should not be credited to James Arminius because he neither invented it nor was he the first to be deceived by it. It is as old as the world. If we are to credit the doctrine to the first ever deceived by it, then we should call it "Adamism" or "Eveism." But if we are to credit it to the one who invented it, then it is "Serpentism." If men would submit to the Lord's definitions of "die" and "love," they would rejoice to see that salvation is by free grace alone, and they would heartily sing, *"Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation,"* (Rev 5:9).

UNCONDITIONAL vs CONDITIONAL ELECTION

The majority of modern Christians almost totally reject any meaningful doctrine of election. Upon their numerous encounters with the concept in the Bible, there is no serious effort to explain it except to effectively dismiss it. This is notwithstanding the fact that one could scarcely find any doctrine having more frequent mention in the scriptures (e.g. Ps 65:4, Mt 20:16, 22:14, 24:24, 24:31, Mk 13:20, Lk 18:7, Rom 8:33, 9:11, 11:5-7, Eph 1:4, Col 3:12, 1Thes 1:4, 2Thes 2:13, Tit 1:1, 1Pet 1:2, 2:9, 2Pet 1:10, Rev 17:14). Their denial of election represents not only a refusal to deal with scripture but also a refusal to deal with some rather obvious implications of everyday reality.

This problem is rampant among modern Baptists also, to the extent that most Baptists today would be shocked to know that unconditional election has been a strong part of their tradition. Great numbers of their present churches were founded on articles of faith that clearly stated the doctrine, and indeed, if anyone would go to the trouble to dig these article out of the church attic or closet or wherever they have been hidden, they would find that their church is *still* officially under this doctrine, though it is likely ignored in the pulpit and quite possibly ridiculed. Robert B. Selph, a Southern Baptist, in his book Southern Baptists and the Doctrine of Election, presents a lengthy list of the most respected leaders in that denomination who taught election *exactly* as Primitive Baptists teach it, and taught it long after they and Primitive Baptists became divided on other issues. Further, he shows this list includes even their most aggressive foreign evangelists, especially the ones who were the initiators of that movement. In this he refuted the idea that election is anti-evangelical. He also denounced the idea that election is an esoteric doctrine intended only for theologians, and quoted other Southern Baptist authorities to the same effect.

The most common Arminian explanation for election is that the numerous scriptures presenting this concept merely intend the idea that God, before the foundation of the world, chose a people for salvation upon *foreseeing* their repentance, belief, obedience, etc. Baptists in droves have bought into this explanation, not knowing that the idea was borrowed from other denominations, and that it would have been denounced as heresy by their own Baptist ancestors. Calvinism agrees that God chose a people, but correctly denies that His choice had anything to do with their own decisions and actions. Rather, the doctrine claims it was *notwithstanding* their decisions and actions. Further, it affirms that belief, repentance and obedience are the effects of election, not the causes of it. So both doctrines acknowledge that the Bible teaches election, but one side argues it was *conditional* upon obedience in the elected, whereas the other says it was *unconditional*, being by the love of God alone, and with the purpose of producing obedience.

The first problem with the Arminian explanation is that it falls short of its goal of eliminating all unconditional aspects of election. Even if men believe on Christ because of a conditional, free-will decision to do so, and even if they were elected by God on this account, it was still God's choice that led to their existence, and this choice was made while knowing whether they would be believers or unbelievers. God's choice to create a man who thereafter becomes a believer was in fact a choice to create a believer, and His choice to create a man who thereafter becomes an unbeliever was in fact a choice to create an unbeliever. This follows from His omniscience and foreknowledge. So the Arminian explanation, notwithstanding all its efforts to the contrary, still has God determining the populations of heaven and hell as surely as He does under the most

hardened forms of Calvinism. This conclusion is unavoidable unless one resorts to virtual Deism – an extreme doctrine which almost all Christians loathe. The position would have to be that it was not God who determined our existence, but that we are all mere accidents of nature. God did in effect say to Mother Nature, “Deal me a hand,” then God played with whatever chance dealt Him in terms of believers and unbelievers. There is no recourse but to either submit to this dubious and loathsome conclusion or else submit to the fact that this system does not afford nearly as much conditionality as was hoped.

But the problems for adversaries of election go well beyond even this. Consider the case of an Arminian missionary who is about to embark upon a trip to preach to the heathen. He is presented with a predicament: He can either preach to the pagan inhabitants of island A or to the pagan inhabitants of island B, but his limited time and resources will not allow him to preach to both. Now, according to his own doctrinal sentiments, if he opts to preach at island A, the inhabitants of island B will be left with no hope of being saved to heaven. On the other hand, if he opts for island B, then the inhabitants of island A will be left in the same hopeless state. Realizing the gravity of the situation, the missionary then prays that God Himself make this critical decision and then move the missionary to act accordingly. It is of course a good thing to preach the gospel to the unevangelized, and it is a good thing to ask for God’s guidance in all such matters, but when the Arminian missionary has finished his prayer, ask him whether he believes in unconditional election. When he angrily denies any such doctrine, ask him what it was that he just prayed for God to do!

This shows the futility with which Christians deny election. The concept is so necessary to a realistic explanation of the world that it cannot be successfully avoided by any doctrinal system except Universalism or Deism. If God does in fact intervene in the affairs of the world, then even in a conditional system His actions will almost surely favor some men over others in the matter of eternal salvation. For example, if He influences the outcome on a battlefield, He thereby favors the eternal salvation of the victors, because the defeated dead men have lost all opportunity to repent and be saved under the rules of the conditional system. On the other hand, those who triumph are afforded yet more time to turn to God. Accordingly, if God chooses to heal one unsaved man of a deadly disease, but denies the same healing to another, then the first man has been favored in exactly the same respect. If God puts one man in an advanced society where Bibles are readily available, but puts another man in a primitive society where Bibles are not to be found, then advocates of conditional election must concede that the salvation of the first man has been favored over the second under the assumptions of the conditional system. Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine any form of divine intervention that would not serve to favor some men over others in this respect.

To have a purely conditional system, there must be unconditional access by all parties to the conditions. This obviously is not the case in the real world. Rather, one will find unconditional denial of access to millions. It is futile to claim that those denied were uniformly less worthy than those blessed with opportunity. Observation and scripture both prove otherwise. The truth is that many of those denied were unconditionally denied. This denial was unconditional in that there was nothing in their own actions that made them any more unworthy than those who were favored. Now if a man is unconditionally denied access to the conditions of salvation, then he is unconditionally denied salvation itself. Arminianism therefore utterly fails to avoid the

conclusion that when the Bible speaks of election, it cannot refer to something that is altogether conditional. It must have some significant basis in divine sovereignty.

As should be expected, the divinely inspired word of God acknowledges these inevitable facts and squarely deals with them. It asserts that while God shows injustice to no man, it is His prerogative to show mercy when, where and how He chooses. No thinking person should be surprised at such claims. If God were obligated to show mercy equally to all, then it would be absurd to call it “mercy.” It would be duty in that case. Nor could it truly be called “mercy” if it were conditional. In that case, it would become a divine obligation to any man who performed the conditions. The Bible of course promises salvation to all believers, and these promises are sure, but even upon making such promises, the Bible remains absolutely committed to the claim that salvation is altogether by the mercy and grace of God. These ideas are reconciled by understanding that belief is the *confirmation* of a saved state, not the *cause* of it. Belief is itself the consequence of the same divine mercy and grace whereby we are saved (Ps 65:4, 110:3, Prov 16:1, Mt 16:17, Jn 6:44-45, 6:64-65, Acts 13:48, 15:9, 16:14, Rom 12:3, Gal 5:22, Eph 1:3-5, 1:19-20, Phil 1:29, 2:12-13, 1Thes 2:13, 2Thes 2:13, 1Tim 1:12-14, 1Pet 1:21, 2Pet 1:3).

The Sovereignty of God

No man will ever make sense of the world or even sense of his own life until he understands divine sovereignty and submits to it. For this reason, it is a principle receiving much emphasis in the Bible. Almost everywhere the principle is taught in the New Testament, the primary point asserted is the divine right to forgive and bless one unworthy man while holding another to account. There should be nothing unexpected in this. Those objecting to the principle actually deny to God the very rights they reserve to themselves. For example, if a man were caught stealing or damaging their property, they would claim the right to forgive that man or the right to demand reparation. Now the Bible claims God has the same rights: “*Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth,*” (Rom 9:18).

An important feature of the last text is that it defends divine sovereignty from the side of mercy. God’s right to condemn wicked men should be apparent. This right follows more from justice than from sovereignty. But the right to show mercy derives from His sovereignty, and the fact that it is *mercy* plainly implies He is under no obligation to show it to anyone, much less is He obligated to show it to everyone. Observe also that the counterpart of receiving mercy is to be *hardened*. In the many places where the Bible speaks of hardened hearts, it conveys not only the idea of being insensitive, uncompassionate, etc, but especially the idea of being recalcitrant to the word of God. The only reason any man humbly receives the truth of God is that he has received mercy to do so. When left to himself, a man will be hostile to God and His truth. He may invent to himself a god and doctrine that are suitable to his carnal palate, and he may represent himself as a religious man, but his god will be a significant alteration of the real God, and his doctrine will be a perversion of the truth. This is confirmation of his innate corruption and unworthiness. Any kindness shown him by God cannot be anything short of outright mercy.

The emphasis put on sovereignty in the New Testament demonstrates it cannot be dismissed as a mere point of theory. It is true in both theory and practice, and true to both time and eternity.

The importance of the principle is implied by the fact it was a primary subject in the first recorded sermon of Jesus Christ. He then warned His Jewish congregation saying:

But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian. – Lk 4:25-27

Evidently, Jesus believes the subject of divine sovereignty is a needful starting place for His gospel message. His congregation responded to the sermon by attempting to cast Him off a cliff, thereby demonstrating that many men do not truly submit to this principle, even though nearly all of them claim otherwise.

Indeed, all men have a struggle with divine sovereignty, but the difference is that some struggle to be reconciled to it while others struggle to deny it. A clear case of the latter can be seen in Arminian ministers who have gone so far as to brazenly preach that, notwithstanding the infinite power of God, He is absolutely helpless to go against a man's will in the matter of salvation. Such claims could not be more opposed to the scriptural assertion that "*it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy,*" (Rom 9:16-17). What is even more remarkable is that anyone would be so naïve and gullible as to believe these absurd claims in spite of the clear testimony of their own experience. Whenever a man sees the path of life carrying him in a direction he did not want and intend, he should learn from it that God has no qualms whatsoever about going against human will. Divine sovereignty is a thing that confronts man almost every day he lives, and while all men must confess to have engaged in futile struggles against it, they are on that same account inexcusable for religious doctrines that deny it.

Christ taught the principle again in His parable of the laborers (Mt 20:1-16). Here, the owner of a vineyard hired workers at various hours of the day, with some being hired as early as 6:00am and others being hired as late as 5:00pm. They all worked until 6:00pm. The earliest laborers had agreed to work the full day for a penny, which was then a reasonable, market wage. However, those hired later in the day were simply told they would be paid what was right. At the end of the day, the laborers were surprised when every man was paid a penny. Objections then came from those who had been hired first. These complained of unfair treatment, because they had been paid no more than the men who worked only one hour. The parable ends with their being corrected. They were told that no wrong had been done them. They had been paid exactly the agreed amount. The obvious intent of the parable is to teach that it is within the power and prerogative of God to bless any man beyond what he deserves, while giving unto other men no more than they deserve. Now the Bible teaches that the fair wage of sin is death (Rom 6:23), so when men are condemned to death, they receive exactly what they deserve, but God reserves the right to bless any man with better than this, while holding others to account.

The vernacular of modern Christians is laced with dubious expressions such as "let God" or "allow God" or "help God" or "invite God," etc. These are word-pairs that should seldom, if ever, cross human lips. They divulge a misguided notion of who God is and what He is. He is Sovereign, Almighty God. He will do as He pleases. Man has neither right to object to Him nor power to enforce his objection. Further, man can neither help Him nor hurt Him. If a man leads

a life in complete rebellion to Him, that man will do God no harm. If a man leads a life of complete obedience to Him, that man will make God no better off. When man believes and obeys, he only helps himself, and when man denies and disobeys, he only hurts himself.

A denial of God's sovereignty is a sure path leading in the direction of a deranged mind. This can be seen in the pathetic absurdity of the argument that Atheists incessantly make in support of their position. This is the so-called "problem of evil," wherein they claim that, if God existed, He would not allow the evil we see befalling men. It is remarkable that men of presumed intellect and education would find credibility in an argument that is both illogical and arrogant. The argument does nothing to disprove the existence of God. Rather, it simply proves that if God does exist, then the Atheist does not approve of Him. The argument says that the only kind of god whose existence will be accepted is a god whose actions are approved. The Atheist's mind is deranged by pride and by insubordination to divine sovereignty.

After the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar became exalted in pride, he was reduced to the state of a deranged beast for a protracted time. History repeatedly shows that when men, or societies of men, become lifted in pride, beastly thinking and behavior are sure to follow. The king's reason was restored unto him only after he looked to heaven and acknowledged the sovereignty of God. He then spoke one of the greatest statements ever on the subject:

And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation. And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? – Dn 4:34-36

This confession was then followed by an inspiring statement as to the outcome of his repentance:

At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me.

I have no doubt that the same repentance would have exactly the same glorious effect on America or any nation that would humbly submit to God. "And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted," (Mt 23:12). Ministers everywhere complain of the declining state of America. Seldom do they consider that the problem started in the pulpit. Denial of sovereignty is a sure path in the direction of a deranged mind that will believe in a deranged doctrine and a deranged philosophy ending in a deranged society.

Now Arminians typically concede that divine sovereignty is an active force in temporal matters, but deny that it has much bearing on eternity. They cannot deny it in temporal matters because God has clearly blessed some men with more intellect, information, opportunity, etc, than others. However, Arminians cannot be consistent while denying its applicability to eternal matters also. This is because their doctrine argues that what men become in eternity is dictated by temporal events. This is a fundamental difference from Calvinism, which contends that what happens in

eternity was decided in eternity. If sovereignty favors some men over others in time, then Arminians cannot consistently say it has no bearing on eternity.

The applicability of sovereignty to eternity can be seen in yet another lesson on this subject:

Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? 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. – Rom 9:21-23

Hence, the sovereignty of God, beyond being a real and formidable factor determining the eternal destinies of men, is actually what ultimately decides those destinies. “*So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy,*” (Rom 9:16). If anyone objects to this, then Paul anticipated such and answered them:

What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion... Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? – Rom 9:14-20

Arminians commonly charge Calvinism with predestinating the non-elect to damnation. This is untrue. Few advocates of Calvinism interpret the last text as saying that God made men for the purpose of damning them, or that He compulsively predestined them to their disobedient behavior. Rather, the “clay” mentioned in the text is representative of the fallen human race in general (Isa 64:8), which was *already* in a dishonorable state, but some were graciously transformed from this into vessels of honor, while others, though also being moved by divine providence, were merely transferred from one dishonorable state to another. These were “fitted to destruction” in the sense that the providential works of God deliberately made manifest their vile character, thereby building the case for their condemnation and destruction. However, Arminianism stands condemned by the text under any interpretation. The verse at least says God has a right to show or withhold mercy as He pleases, and even in the event the text intended the idea that God predestined men to damnation, no man would have right to object, because men do themselves ultimately destroy almost everything they create.

The Scriptural Basis for Election

A proper understanding of divine sovereignty naturally leads to the doctrine of election. The Bible is replete with teachings on this doctrine, and it has no stronger advocate than Jesus Christ Himself. In one of His most memorable lessons, He warned that in the last days there would be many false christs and prophets, showing great signs and wonders, and if it were possible, they would deceive even the *elect* (Mt 24:24). The term “elect” was given here without explanation because any Bible reader should have been familiar with the concept. In the days of Elijah, when deception was so rampant in Israel that the prophet thought himself to be the only remaining believer, the Lord corrected him saying, “*I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal,*” (Rom 11:4, 1Ki 19:18). Observe that

the declaration was not that seven thousand men had reserved God; rather, God had reserved seven thousand men. These were men chosen by God to be distinguished from the deluded masses of the day so that a witness would be left in Israel. Isaiah confirmed this by saying, *“Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah,”* (Isa 1:9). Again, the reason for the existence of this remnant was that God had left it. In absence of this, the entire nation would have gone into apostasy and been destroyed. Paul applied the same principle to his own generation, saying, *“Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace,”* (Rom 11:5). This was then followed by one of the most emphatic statements in the Bible declaring that election is purely an act of divine grace and has nothing to do with human works. It is altogether the consequence of divine decision and action.

The same principle has been true in all eras of time, though in the last days it will become particularly pronounced. In speaking of those days, Paul corroborated the words of Christ, saying that deception under the son of perdition (i.e. “antichrist”) will be pervasive among those who will be damned. He put such emphasis on the deceit of those times that even a child of God might fear of being carried away with it. So Paul added the reassuring words, *“But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth,”* (2Thess 2:13). Now Paul does not give thanks to any men for their faithfulness in these future times of extraordinary temptation. Rather, he *always* gave thanks to God for it, because, as in the days of Elijah and Isaiah, it will be on account of God alone that any will be reserved and left to believe the truth. This will be the result of them having been chosen or elected by God unto that end, which God did from the very beginning. The word “beginning” here can only mean from eternity past. Any decision or choice God will ever make was in fact *forever* made. *“Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world,”* (Acts 15:18).

Christ also said that at the time of the end, He would send forth His angels to *“gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other,”* (Mt 24:31). This shows that when the Bible speaks of the “elect,” it generally refers to all who will be gathered to heaven. It does not typically mean some special subset of the saved, though Arminianism sometimes attempts to dismiss the doctrine by claiming such. Paul elsewhere said the elect are those who cannot be charged with sin (Rom 8:33). This characterization surely applies to all saved men. He also said the elect have a special obligation to be merciful, kind and forbearing of others on account of the mercy and kindness they have themselves received (Col 3:12). Peter added that the elect are those who were chosen unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Christ (1Pet 1:2). Again, these characterizations apply to all saved men, so that the term “elect” cannot be confined to a mere special class of them.

In speaking of the severity of the last days, Jesus said, *“And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved: but for the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days,”* (Mk 13:20). This verse shows that the elect are alternately termed the “chosen,” and indeed the underlying Greek words are the same. Elsewhere Jesus taught that *“many are called, but few are chosen,”* (Mt 20:16, 22:14), but the word “chosen” is elsewhere translated “elect.” The principle in this scripture is that many come under the gospel call, but few were chosen or elected to believe it. Context will show that “few” does not contradict other

scriptures that speak of Christ saving many; rather, the term is descriptive of that particular wicked generation of Jews in which the Lord lived. A remarkable thing about this scripture is that it is placed in a parable that would seem to teach that many are called but few *choose*. The reader might therefore be surprised that Jesus instead drew the conclusion that few *are chosen*. Now the fact that men were choosers in the parable is not to be denied, but the parable teaches that there is an underlying reason for this, namely, that men choose because they were chosen.

This principle is well established in scripture. David said, *“Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts,”* (Ps 65:4). Hence, the approach of a man unto God is the consequence of God’s choice of that man and His drawing power upon him. There are no exceptions to this rule. Jesus said, *“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day,”* (Jn 6:44). This divine choice and its drawing power are not only necessary but are also sufficient, as may be seen in the words:

All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. – Jn 6:37-39

Those here given by the Father to Christ are one and the same with the elect, and they represent all who will finally be saved. Jesus Himself prayed, *“Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him,”* (Jn 17:1-2).

Sadly, rebellious man, being bent upon his uninspired philosophy, commonly rails against election and the accompanying doctrine of predestination. On the other hand, one of the greatest statements in the Bible of gratitude and praise to God is based on these very things:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. – Eph 1:3-6

This scripture should eradicate all doubt as to whether the Bible teaches unconditional election. It plainly states that all spiritual blessings are in Christ, and that they are given to men in accordance with divine choice that was made before the foundation of the world. This choice was clearly of men individually and personally, and they were clearly chosen unto a predestined salvation. It was a choice *unto* obedience, not *because* of it. There is not an ounce of conditionality to be found anywhere in the text. It is a pure and perfect statement of sovereign, unmerited grace. This is a thing for which men should show gratitude and praise, and no man should cavil against it. If any sincere, Christ-loving person finds this doctrine to be adversarial to their preconceived notions, then they ought to humbly seek a better understanding of the doctrine rather than contriving convenient ways to circumvent and deny what the word of God has plainly and repeatedly said.

I will finish this section by addressing a common accusation against election, namely, that it tends to the salvation of a small number of people. Of course, the worthiness of any doctrine is not to be measured by the degree to which it comports with man's judgment as to how many God should save. Much less is it to be judged by its ability to comfort men with a salvation they do not have. Nonetheless, this accusation against election is altogether false. The truth is that some advocates of election tend dangerously close to Universalism, even as do some advocates of Arminianism. It is also true that other advocates on both sides of the fence conceive of heaven as being a very lonely place. What may be said of one doctrine may also be said of the other in this respect. But a scripturally-plausible argument for a large number of redeemed can be much better made from a regime of election than from Arminianism. The reason is that Arminianism causes salvation to swing on humanly-fulfilled conditions, and is therefore limited by the opportunity and ability of humans to fulfill those conditions. On the other hand, election causes salvation to swing on divinely fulfilled conditions, and has potential for salvation no less than the power of God Himself.

The Role of Human Choice in Salvation

The primary reason for opposition to unconditional election is a firm commitment to the preconceived notion that salvation is ultimately determined by human choice. Indeed, many Christians have made this the absolute cornerstone of their belief system, and have done this without really questioning whether such ideas are biblical. Others may be aware that numerous scriptures are resistant to such thinking, but have found creative ways to circumvent the simple, intuitive meanings of the texts. In their way of thinking, determinative human choice is the tune to which every scripture must dance and to which every conclusion must be adapted.

It is true that a choice to believe, love and serve Christ is a sure mark of a saved state. This is the hope and joy of all true Christians. The error is in supposing that human choice is *determinative* in this matter. Rather, it is *indicative*. The scriptures clearly and repeatedly teach that divine choice is the determinative factor, and that divine choice elicits a human choice serving as visible confirmation of the salvation God has freely given: "*Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power...*" (Ps 110:3). "*Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts...*" (Ps 65:4). "*All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out,*" (Jn 6:37). "*So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy,*" (Rom 9:16). This principle was the basis of Paul's joy concerning the Thessalonians: "*Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance...*" (1Thess 1:4-5).

Since Arminianism makes determinative human choice the very cornerstone of its doctrine, one would expect this to be a matter of great emphasis in the Bible. To the contrary, the word "choose" and its derivatives occur 32 times in the New Testament, or 52 times if one includes "elect" and its derivatives (the two words oftentimes having the same Greek roots). Of these 52 occurrences, God is the chooser in 48 of them! In the remaining four, none have to do with eternal destiny. Of the 48 referring to God, nearly all have to do with it. Add to this many other verses teaching the same principle but with other words. Verily, the principle is a primary theme

of the Bible, as may be seen in the following sample: Mt 1:21, 20:1-16, 22:2-14, 24:24, 24:31, Jn 6:37-39, 8:43-47, 10:26-29, 15:16, 17:1-2, 18:37, Acts 13:48, 18:9-10, Rom 8:28-33, 9:1-24, 11:1-7, Eph 1:3-11, 1Thes 1:4-5, 2Thes 2:13, Tit 1:1-2, 1Pet1:1-2, 2:9, 2Pet 1:10.

The claim that election is based on foreseen human obedience is a mere superstition having no scriptural support whatsoever. It is decisively refuted by numerous scriptures, all of which show that men were chosen by God *unto* obedience, not on account of it. This is clearly seen in:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love. –Eph 1:3-4

Observe that the Ephesians were not chosen because *they were* holy and without blame; rather, they were chosen that they *should be* such. The principle occurs again in: “*But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light,*” (1Pet 2:9). Thus, they were chosen for the light and for the praise of God, not because they were in the light and praising God. Earlier, Peter addressed his readers as, “*Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ...*” (1Pet 1:2). Observe these were elected *unto* obedience, not on account of it. Christ stated the principle in: “*Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit...*” (Jn 15:16).

The obedience under consideration in these texts also includes belief in Jesus Christ itself, as may be seen in: “*And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed,*” (Acts 13:48). The text does not say as many as believed were ordained to eternal life; rather, it states exactly the reverse, thus in outright opposition to Arminianism. The same idea is expressed in: “*But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you,*” (Jn 10:26). The reason they did not believe was because they were not of His sheep. Many modern Christians would here assert the reverse, thus switching the cause and the effect. The same would be done with Christ’s statement: “*To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice,*” (Jn 18:37). Those who are of the truth and hear His voice are none other than His sheep, who in turn were ordained to eternal life, being elected unto that end. Belief and obedience are the results of election, not the causes. Consider also Paul’s admonition to the Colossians:

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. – Col 3:12-13

This statement would be senseless if the elect had been chosen on the basis of foreseen merit. The logical consequence of election is that those elected should be loving, merciful, longsuffering, forgiving, etc, because election is itself an act of love, mercy and forgiveness. It is not an award for merit or obedience, whether seen or foreseen, and nothing could be further from the truth than to say that it is.

A likely reason so many Christians have adopted a conditional system of salvation is that it logically commences from the plausible premise that man is endowed with a capacity for choice. I acknowledge this idea is supported both by scripture and conscience. However, sound reasoning is thereafter abandoned by Arminians when *non sequitur* conclusions are drawn from this premise. These errors include:

1) Freedom of choice with respect to action does not imply freedom of choice with respect to heart. Every Bible reader knows that God requires obedience from the heart, but obedience in action and obedience in heart are not the same things. Almost any man can choose to eat chitterlings, but very few men can choose to eat them *and like them*. Accordingly, depraved man has freedom to act in obedience to God, and is therefore culpable for his sin, but his heart is not free. He can obey God, but he cannot do it in love and joy because his true love is for sin. Paul described this corruption of nature with:

For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. – Rom 8:5-8

When Paul speaks of the “flesh,” he does not mean a mere attitude or mood. He means a state of being, and men are by nature born into this state of being; therefore, the Apostle elsewhere says, “*But the **natural** man 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,*” (1Cor 2:14). Belief in Christ is the most important form of obedience, but this is entirely an obedience of the heart. Man is not voluntary in what he believes. Indeed, a man may be unable to believe even what he wants to believe. This is because the proposition clashes with his reason or experience. The scriptures say spiritual things clash with the reason and experience of the natural man. This is why he does not receive them. Spiritual man believes spiritual things because they harmonize with what God has already put in his heart. As Christ Himself said:

No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me. – Jn 6:44-45

2) Freedom of choice does not imply freedom to become something we are not. Everyone understands that a man’s freedom to choose does not mean he can simply opt to be a star athlete or world-renown scientist, yet they should also understand that a lame man could sooner become the world’s fastest man than a carnal man could transform himself into a spiritual man. The Lord Jesus gave a simple principle when He said, “*That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the spirit is spirit,*” (Jn 3:6). Flesh can only beget flesh. It cannot beget spirit. The same idea was conveyed by Paul: “*They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, and they that are after the spirit the things of the spirit.*” It is utterly impossible for a fleshly man to remake himself into a spiritual man. Spirit must be begotten of Spirit even as flesh is begotten of flesh.

Jesus said to the carnal Jews of his own time, “*Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye **cannot** hear my word,*” (Jn 8:43). Shortly thereafter He explained, “*He that is of God*

heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God," (Jn 8:47). This is simply to say they were not spiritual, and being in such a state, the Lord said they could not hear His word. This does not mean they were intellectually incapable of understanding it. The gospel is a simple proposition. Rather, it means their corrupt hearts could not joyously submit to it. Two chapters later He said of the same class, *"But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you,"* (Jn 10:26). This states the same principle: They did not believe because they were not spiritual. If a man can neither hear His word nor believe it while in a carnal state, then such a man is surely incapable of elevating himself to a spiritual state. This is directly confirmed by what the Lord said in Jn 6:44, *"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day."*

3) Freedom of choice does not imply any man would properly exercise that choice. It is commonly believed that if freedom exists to choose between two alternatives, then both alternatives have some probability of occurring. This does not follow. God surely has freedom of choice, but this does not mean there is any possibility of Him choosing for injustice. This is because God's freedom of choice is accompanied by a just and righteous *nature*. Accordingly, if a man is presented with complete freedom to choose between eating or starving, drinking or thirsting, enduring pain or enjoying comfort, then one can be sure that starvation, thirst and pain have no possibility of happening. These outcomes can be ruled out on the basis of his nature. Now the Bible is very clear that the depraved nature of man rules out any possibility of his opting for spiritual things. This is plainly shown by verses already quoted in this section. These verses imply that any conditional system of salvation is doomed for failure unless the conditions are suited to man's carnal palate, but the idea that man is saved by carnal gratification is absurd.

The futility of conditional systems is taught from the opening pages of the Bible. There we were presented with the simplest conditional system mind could conceive. Adam was free to indulge in a paradise provided he simply chose to abstain from a single tree. This system ended in total ruin. If this simple system failed even when applied to a pure man such as Adam, how much less could we expect success of more rigorous systems applied to men of depravity? If even pure men under corrupt influence fail under conditional systems, then corrupt men under corrupt influence surely have no hope. This same pattern is observed under the Law. It was a choice-based system that ended in ruin for the entire human race. *"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God,"* (Rom 3:23). *"Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight..."* (Rom 3:20).

These observations show that Arminianism not only fails in its attempt to dismantle unconditional election, it also fails to provide any plausible alternative to it. Election is the inevitable result of logic, observation and scripture. No other system offers any hope to depraved man. The Apostle Paul, having a complete understanding of this fact, despaired to preach in the wicked city of Corinth until he heard the reassuring words of Christ, *"Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city,"* (Acts 18:9-10). There were no Christians in Corinth at the time these words were spoken. When Christ said he had *"much people"* in this city, the meaning was that He had many elect people in that city. This is what the apostle needed to hear to inspire him to his work. In absence of this, preachers can only warn the wicked. They cannot preach in

the joyous hope of sincere conversions. Therefore, in opposing election, Arminianism unwittingly pleads for a hopeless cause and for the damnation of the whole world.

Preterition

This section is actually redundant. Preterition is merely the opposite side of election. It means the act of passing by. The doctrine refers to the fact that God in election chose some for salvation while passing by others, who were instead left to the consequences of their own choices. Notwithstanding its redundancy, preterition is considered here because many Arminians make it a point of contention, accusing it of effectively predestinating men to hell.

The first problem with Arminians on this point is that they make a typical error of implicating themselves with the accusations they make. The accusers do themselves teach preterition. Reason allows nothing else. If God intervenes to any degree to lead any man to the truth, and does not do the same for all other men, then those other men have in effect been passed by. An objection to preterition can only be sustained by a Universalist or Deist. The accusers thankfully are neither, and deplore these doctrines as much as Calvinists.

Further, Arminians do not consider that a divine decision to create a man while knowing he will choose for hell is no different in its final effect than a divine decision to leave such a man to the consequences of his choice. If one act is to be accused of predestinating to damnation, then so must the other. On this point, Arminianism yet again errs in failing to consider the implications of an all-knowing and all-foreknowing God.

Still, Arminians will complain that Calvinism has God being arbitrary, having no apparent basis for His decision to save some while bypassing others. But this objection is also invalid, and could as easily be made against the objectors. Choice to save one and not another is no different in intent or effect from choice of a system that is foreseen as saving one and not another. God not only created Heaven and Earth, but also freely chose the laws that would regulate both, including the laws of salvation. As He considered His various alternatives, He knew exactly who would be saved under each alternative and who would not. Choice of a system is with Him simultaneously a choice of all who will be saved by that system. So the favorable choice of a man as opposed to the choice of a system that is foreseen as favoring that man differ only if compliance with the system is a meritorious act on the part of the man. Since even most Arminians at least ostensibly deny human merit in salvation, they have no basis for charging Calvinism with being arbitrary.

Consider a governor who goes to a prison to pardon either or both of two criminals. He could outright choose one or the other, or choose neither or both. Alternatively, he could require a conditional system under which they could be pardoned. Suppose his chosen condition is that they jump a certain distance. Now if he knows prior to the fact that one criminal is lame and cannot perform the jump, then his choice of the conditional system differs neither in intent nor in effect from an outright choice of the able prisoner. If one approach is to be faulted for damning the lame prisoner, then the other is equally at fault.

But suppose both prisoners are able, and that they differ only in that one is willing and the other is not. It would still follow that the governor's choice of a condition he knew one prisoner was unwilling to do was all the same in intent and effect as unconditionally bypassing that prisoner. The two approaches differ only if one thinks there is merit in jumping. Now the Bible is very plain that men are not saved by their own merit. They are saved by grace (Rom 6:23, Eph 2:1-10, Tit 3:3-5). This would at least mean that any conditions they performed to obtain salvation could not be meritorious. However, it truly means more than this: It means salvation is in fact unconditional. This can be seen in the example of the prisoners. One could say their *opportunity* at pardon was by grace, but their pardon itself was not by grace because it required compliance with a condition. Now the Bible never merely says that by grace we had an opportunity to be saved. Rather, it says we were saved by grace outright. It was altogether by grace because we were prisoners who were *neither able nor willing* to jump.

The biblical system of salvation is lacking neither in objectivity nor in grace. This system teaches that before the foundation of the world, God purposed to create the human race, and He also purposed to give a substantial number of that race to His Son (Jn 6:37, 17:1-2, Rom 8:28-33, Eph 1:3-12, 2Tim 1:8-10, Tit 1:1-3). This gift was without regard to sin and damnation. They were to be the possession of the Son with or without sin; with or without the fall of man. God purposed to create all men in innocence, and did nothing to necessitate their damnation, but He made them subject to fall. The entire race was foreseen as falling at once in the sin of Adam. Those who had been given to the Son were on that account chosen or elected for salvation, and the Son purposed to come for their rescue to redeem His rightful possession, while leaving all others to the consequences of their condemnation. This system is neither unfair nor arbitrary, and any complaint against it is either hypocritical or else it is effectively a plea for Universalism.

FULLERISM (FOUR-POINT CALVINISM) REFUTED

Old Baptists and conventional Calvinists are in absolute alliance in their claim that the death of Christ was intended for the eternal salvation of the elect only. This doctrine is commonly called “limited atonement.” It would actually be better called “effectual atonement,” since it is in fact *unlimited* in its power to save and is therefore *effectual* to that end. This doctrine is opposed not only by Arminianism but by a modified form of Calvinism that Baptists often call “Fullerism.” It is also known as “four-point Calvinism,” because it affirms all points of Calvinism *except* limited atonement. The name “Fullerism” is intended to attribute the doctrine to the English Baptist minister, Andrew Fuller (1754-1815), though the more likely originator was Moses Amyraut (1596-1664). It is therefore sometimes called “Amyraldism.”

Fuller is praised by some as a theological genius for the presumed novelty of his doctrine, whereas others correctly hold him in suspicion on the same account. Though he seems to have been a man of high character and commendable evangelical zeal, his theology does not reflect the clarity and cohesion of thought to be ranked as a genius work. He is so confusing that even his admirers disagree on how to interpret him. If a man cannot explain himself where others can clearly understand, this is good indication that the man is confused himself. “Muddy water is usually shallow; deep water is usually clear.”

Fullerism says that Christ died for all men, and that there is a “free offer” of salvation to all men, but that only the elect will receive it and be saved in the end. Fullerism affirms depravity (albeit with distraction), and therefore says that no man will come to Christ without irresistible and irreversible grace. It also correctly affirms that such grace is given only to the elect. It is common with Fullerites to say that the death of Christ was “sufficient for all but efficient only for the elect.” They typically consider the free offer feature of their doctrine to be of great importance, and this is a likely motivation for their belief in universal atonement.

The doctrine of universal atonement is a package with a pretty wrapper but very ugly contents. Few actually open the box to see what is in it. Its advocates sincerely think the doctrine honors God, but closer scrutiny shows that it does the very reverse. It cheapens His love, casts doubt on His sincerity, portrays Him as irrational, understates the true importance of Christ and even obscures the deity of Christ. Fullerism foolishly adopts this doctrine, and not only acquires the odious implications it bears, but also sets itself at insurmountable contradiction in its vain attempt to reconcile it with the other points of Calvinism. In the next section, I will examine universal atonement in general, then follow this with analysis of the peculiar faults of Fullerism.

Errors of Universal Atonement

The claims that God loves all men and that Christ died for all men have become the monotonous mantras of modern Christians. They naively believe these claims honor God. They would be surprised to know that most early American Christians would have considered them very offensive to God. But with little or no compunction do modern Christians imply that God loves the likes of Hitler, Stalin and Mao Ze-dong, who each ruthlessly killed tens of millions of people, including Jews and Christians, and so does God also love those modern Muslim radicals who gleefully murder Christians in the most monstrous manners. Those who say these things about

the love of God would be offended were such claims made of them, but still, they seem to give little if any thought to the credibility or conscionability of making such claims of God.

If anyone will presume to answer this by citing Paul and other great sinners of the Bible, then observe that there was an *infinite* difference between Paul and the monsters just named. Paul was *contrite* for what he did, *repented* of what he did, and *sought* the mercy and forgiveness of God *through Jesus Christ*. The scriptures are very clear that God *absolutely* loves, *unconditionally* loves, and *forever* loves *all people* of this description. But Paul clearly and emphatically claimed that it was the love of God that transformed him to the compassionate Christian he became (Tit 3:3-6, 1Tim, 1:12-16, Eph 2:1-10). This claim could not possibly be true if others under the same love did not respond accordingly. If God loved Hitler the same as Paul, then Paul was disingenuous for claiming that it was the love of God that changed him. In that case, it was Paul who made the difference, not the love of God. Be sure that to such ungrateful claims Paul would rend his garments and cry “God forbid!” I think the honest conscience of any born-again Christian would say the same. So when we see wicked men persisting in wickedness and infidelity until death, never being changed by Christ or to Christ, this shows that God never did to them what He did to Paul, implying that God did not love them the same as Paul or as a multitude of other sinners whose hearts have been turned by God.

Little do modern Christians consider that if their claims were true, the damned in hell could protest the praises of the redeemed in heaven, saying that Christ did no more for one than for the other, thus reviling and making nonsense of the heavenly refrain: “*Thou art worthy... for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation,*” (Rev 5:9). Observe that these people were *redeemed* by Christ, not merely made redeemable, as is claimed by universal atonement. Their song of praise powerfully, thankfully and joyously implies that it was Christ that made the difference, not themselves.

Yet, in Arminianism, it was not Christ that made the difference; rather, it was the choice of the sinner. Against all that scripture says, and contrary to the testimonies of their own hearts and consciences, Arminians espouse a doctrine that says the death of Christ did absolutely nothing to distinguish their case from that of a man burning in hell. Their heartfelt confessions may indeed give Christ the praise, yet having minds that are mesmerized by monotonous mantra, and in which factoid has displaced fact, they set themselves for defense of theories that actually dishonor the Savior they love.

The claim of universal divine love, naively thought by many Christians to honor God, turns into rottenness the very foundation of their own salvation:

Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. – 2Tim 2:19

All agree that the word “*knoweth*” here means “*loveth*.” The text is senseless if it only refers to awareness. God is equally aware of those who are *not* His. The claims of the text are reduced to absurdity when it is also claimed that billions under the very same divine love will be made the objects of God’s eternal wrath and damnation. Who could conceive of a more precarious foundation than this? Such irrational ideas have no place in the teachings of God. The Bible very plausibly says, “*For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of*

his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life,” (Rom 5:10). Then to this it adds, *“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”* (Rom 8:32). This verse says what should be obvious to any thinking mind: If God loved a man to the extent that He would suffer His own Son die for him, then it is utterly unthinkable that God would deny that man anything else he needed for eternal deliverance. Accordingly, it is unthinkable, and in disrespect to the eternal love of God, to suppose that God would damn such a man to hell. The Savior Himself affirmed:

All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day. – Jn 6:37-40

This text plainly implies that the death of Christ was not indiscriminate, but that its objects are conclusively distinguished by their belief in Him, and that their belief is owing to the fact they are lovingly and effectually drawn by the Father. He would say a few verses later:

No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me. – Jn 6:44-45

Obviously, there is no better source for knowing the intents of the crucifixion than the very one who was crucified. His claim was that He gave His life for *His sheep* (Jn 15:11), who He identified with the words, *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me”* (Jn 10:27), thus distinguishing them from others of whom He said *“But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you,”* (vs 26).

What could be more disingenuous than the claim that God could have *ever* loved those He damns to eternal hell? What in pagan superstition could be any more dubious than the claim that God loves a man before a fatal car wreck, heart attack, etc, but afterwards pours on him *“indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish,”* (Rom 1:9)? How could such claims ever be reconciled to repeated scriptural assertions that the love of God is *unchangeable* and *eternal* (Jer 31:3, Mal 3:6, Rom 8:28-39, Heb 13:8), and what hope could any man have if God’s love were any less?

The inevitable reply to all this will be the familiar handful of scriptures that speak of God loving the world (Jn 3:16), of Christ being the propitiation for the sins of the whole world (1Jn 2:2), of Christ tasting death for every man (Heb 2:9), and of Him giving Himself a ransom for all (1Tim 2:6). Calvinists have rightfully protested these arguments for centuries, showing that repeatedly in scripture the words “world” and “all” and “every” do not have the meanings that are imputed to them here. Indeed, the term “world,” even though frequently used, *almost never* means “all men without exception” in the writings of John. Nor is this the meaning of “*whole world*” in 1Jn 2:2. Besides, this text does not say Christ is the *potential* propitiation, but that He is *in fact* the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, meaning that whoever in this world has received propitiation did so only in Christ (Acts 4:12). Even the habits of common language demonstrate the necessity that terms like “world” and “all” be interpreted in light of context. For example, if

one were to say “the world is guilty of racism,” none would interpret this as a statement of all men without exception. If one were to say “all men are obligated to pay taxes,” the intents of the statement would be spontaneously judged as true, yet the clear meaning is “all men” satisfying implicit assumptions. Now when the texts in question are considered in context of all other scriptures, it is *obvious* that implicit assumptions are being made, which brings us to the real problem leading to their misinterpretations:

In an epic case of eisegesis, these texts are interpreted in total disregard to all that has been presented before, as well as in total disregard to clear scriptural declarations that those who persist in Christ-denying unbelief are under the *abiding* wrath of God (Jn 3:36), shall die in their sins (Jn 8:24), will not and cannot hear the word of Christ (Jn 8:43), are of their father the Devil (Jn 8:44), are therefore not of God and will not hear His word (Jn 8:47), are not of Christ’s sheep (Jn 10:26), are therefore omitted from those for whom the Savior said He would die (Jn 10:21), are expressly excluded from the Savior’s prayer for the redeemed (Jn 17:9), are likened to dogs and swine (Mt 7:6), are said to be corrupt trees that cannot bring forth good fruit (Mt 12:33), are called whited sepulchers full of dead men’s bones (Mt 23:27), are likened to vipers who cannot escape the damnation of hell (Mt 12:34 & 23:33), are so innately corrupt they cannot please God (Rom 8:5), consider the crucifixion to be foolishness (1Cor 1:23), will not receive the things of the Spirit of God (1Cor 2:14), are taken captive by the Devil at his will (2Tim 2:26), are dogs returning to their own vomit and sows hasting back to their wallows in the mire (2Pet 2:22), shall be cast into the lake of fire (Rev 21:8). Under what stretch of any sane imagination could one conclude that the eternal love of God *ever* embraced a man who was left to live and die and burn in eternal hell under these vile and hopeless characterizations? Under what stretch of any sane imagination could one *doubt* the love of God for a man who was delivered from, or out of, such vile filth by the grace of God to sincere belief and love of Jesus Christ? The point is that when the whole of the Bible is considered, those scriptures misused to support universal atonement *obviously* pertain to *all men* in the *whole world* who *will and would rejoice to believe them*.

Only a man who was mesmerized by monotonous mantra, or caught up in religious frenzy, could believe that our Savior God could love a man in life but cast him into an eternal hell in death. No thinking man could conclude there is any hope of salvation in divine love so transient as to be instantly turned into eternal wrath merely by a car wreck, plane crash or hot electrical wire. The words of God are unmistakably clear: “*Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee,*” (Jer 31:3). “*For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life,*” (Rom 5:10). “*He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?*” (Rom 8:32). “*For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord,*” (Rom 8:38-39). Therefore, “*the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity,*” (2Tim 2:19).

The preaching of Christ and His Apostles completely corroborates the principles here set forth. Scripture contain numerous sermons and testimonials showing how they preached. Especially important are the cases where the Apostles preached to the unconverted: Acts 2:14-39, 3:12-26,

4:8-12, 7:2-53, 10:28-48, 13:16-41, 16:28-31, 17:22-31, 22:1-21, 24:10-21, 26:2-29. Where did the Apostles *at any time* say to their unconverted congregations that God loved them or that Christ died for them? This practice that is so common to advocates of universal atonement, and so inherent to their theology, *has not a single precedent* in all the word of God. The clear, repeated and emphatic message of the Bible is that God loves, *absolutely* loves, *unconditionally* loves and *forever* loves *believers*. Belief in Jesus Christ is the test whereby the love of God is known, and the test by which the death of Jesus Christ is known to apply.

The scriptures are replete with passages that describe Christ as dying for the *definite* salvation of a *definite* people. In particular, these are described as: His people (Mt 1:21), His sheep (Jn 10:11), the children of God (Jn 11:51), His friends (Jn 15:13), those given Him by the Father (Jn 17:1), God's elect (Rom 8:32-33), the church (Eph 5:25), a peculiar people (Tit 2:14), and those who are called (Heb 9:15). In every instance, these texts imply a special, definite people, and imply that Christ acquired for them a definite salvation. The scriptures elsewhere describe them as being under unique divine love (Ps 93:11-12, 1Cor 11:32, Heb 12:6-8, Rev 3:19).

The claim that God has redemptive love for all men is flatly contradicted by Rom 9:13, "*As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.*" Observe that Paul said not a word to qualify this statement, and every objection universal atonement has ever made to it was anticipated by the Apostle and refuted in the surrounding context.

Perhaps the worst error of all is that universal atonement vastly understates the intents and accomplishments of Christ's death, thereby denying Him proper praise. The Bible attributes almost every aspect of our salvation to Christ and His death, including our justification, regeneration and sanctification. Universal atonement *must* deny this. Since it claims Christ died for all men, it cannot attribute anything to His death beyond what is common to all men. All men are not justified. All men are not regenerated. All men are not sanctified. The best this doctrine can do is say that Christ made salvation a *possibility* for all men.

Exactly what did Christ buy on the cross? The scriptures are resolute and clear on this point: He bought *everything*. This is expressed in: "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with **all** spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love,*" (Eph 1:3,4). Observe how the text says *all* spiritual blessings are *in* Christ. Indeed, even election itself is in Christ because the text says we were chosen *in* Christ, not *to be in* Christ. Hence, a people had been given to Christ by God the Father, and it was upon this account they were chosen or elected for salvation after they, along with all others, fell into sin and condemnation.

Further, the Bible attributes the legal aspects of our salvation to Christ and His death. This is why the mind of God was completely reconciled by it: "*For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life,*" (Rom 5:10). Observe that we were not made reconcilable but were actually *reconciled*. This was completed at the cross, as is proven by the fact that it was done when we were contemplated as enemies, not as believers. This completed work is confirmed by:

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. – 2Cor 5:18-20

Hence, reconciliation was finalized in the death of Christ, and ministers are now committed with “*the word of reconciliation*,” which obviously means they are to publish it and promise it to believers, calling upon them to give praise for what Christ has *already* and *entirely* done. “*For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified*,” (Heb 10:14). And these facts are what moved Paul to say, “*For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified*,” (1Cor 2:2).

Furthermore, the Bible attributes the vital aspects of our salvation to Christ and His death. Paul said, “*And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins...*” (Eph 2:1). This is clearly a reference to the new birth. Only a few verses later he added, “*But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus*,” (vss 4-6). Hence, the death of Christ ensured the spiritual quickening of all His people. Next consider the Savior’s own words, “*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me*,” (Jn 12:32). The expression “*all men*” here obviously means all manner of men as no other interpretation is sensible. Now this implies He is not merely the object to which men are drawn, whether by freewill or election or anything else, but He is the drawing power itself, and this follows from the fact He was “*lifted up*” on the cross. If He died for all men, then we are compelled to the untenable conclusion that all men will be quickened and drawn to Him.

Add to this numerous other scriptures that attribute our quickening to Him, and though not mentioning His death, Christian conscience forbids that we exclude it. In particular, He seeks out His people: “*For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost*,” (Lk 19:10). “*And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring*,” (Jn 10:16). Peter explained this saying, “*Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever*,” (1 Peter 1:23). Here the expression “*word of God*” means the Living Word, or Christ Himself, which is corroborated by: “*And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit*,” (1Cor 15:41). So we are not only made alive *to Him* in the new birth, we are also made alive *by Him*. This life is given by the power of His voice: “*The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live*,” (Jn 5:25). The heart of the sinner is not only changed *for Him* but it is also changed *by Him*: “*And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ*,” (Col 2:10-11). He is not only what is revealed, but He is also the revealer: “*All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him*,” (Mt 11:27). Hence, Peter says we are those, “*Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God*,” (1Peter 1:21). John powerfully confirms: “*No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him*,” (Jn 1:18). Now all

these things show that Christ did far more than purchase a possibility of redemption. His death on the cross *bought* and *ensured* spiritual vitality for all its recipients.

Moreover, the Bible attributes our sanctification to Christ and his death. Paul said of Him, “*Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works,*” (Titus 2:14). This text says He died to *redeem* us, not to merely make us redeemable. It also says that His death was intended to produce a “*peculiar people*” – not the salvageability of all people. Accordingly, Paul said of Him, “*Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father,*” (Gal 1:4). Thus, His intent was to deliver “*from this present evil world,*” which could hardly be said if He did no more for those delivered than the evil men from whom He delivered them. Accordingly, the redeemed in glory sing, “*...for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation,*” (Rev 5:9). Note that they were redeemed by His blood “*out of*” every kindred, tongue, etc. In all these texts, the death of Christ is praised as the power that set the saints apart. This is not the case under Arminianism. This system says the saints set themselves apart by their own freewill and ability.

Now all of the scriptures mentioned above have the death of Christ doing vastly more than either Fullerism or Arminianism can afford to admit. To summarize what they said:

- 1) He *eternally loved* us, even though we are not lovable (Rom 5:6-8, 8:35-39).
- 2) He *redeemed* us, not merely making us redeemable (Rev 5:9).
- 3) He *reconciled* us to God, not merely making us reconcilable (Rom 5:10).
- 4) He *justified* us, not merely making us “justifiable” (Rom 4:25, 5:9).
- 5) He *sanctified* us, not merely making us “sanctifiable” (Heb 10:10).
- 6) He *quicken*ed us, having ensured this by His death (Jn 5:25, 1Cor 15:45, Eph 2:5).
- 7) He *perfected* us, not merely making us perfectible (Heb 10:10).

Very well could the Apostle say, “*But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world,*” (Gal 6:14). To all these things that He bought by His death on the cross, we are constrained to add one more: “*For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's,*” (1Cor 6:20). Now how could any sensible man, while drowning in this deluge of data, persist in the claim that the death of Christ bought *only a possibility* of salvation to all men?

Errors of the Free Offer

A small particle is typically a thing of insignificance, but not when it is stuck in a man's eye. The subject of the so-called “free offer” or “general offer” of the gospel is a case where small and unnoticed perversions of scripture have greatly obscured vision and created confusion.

Andrew Fuller correctly concluded that the call of the gospel is to all men, but he thought it impossible to make sense of this without somehow making the atonement universal. So he hatched up a theory that said it was universal in some ways but not in others, then, as if this were not confusing enough, he added irrelevant, distracting explanations about human depravity to thoroughly confuse the issue and possibly himself also.

The first problem with Fuller's reasoning is in the term "offer" itself. Nowhere in the word of God is this term used in reference to the gospel. Nor does the Bible refer to it as an "invitation." Rather, it is consistently represented as a "call." The difference is important. A man does no wrong in declining what is truly an offer or invitation, but if he rejects the gospel, his case will be worse than Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment (Mt 10:15, 11:23-24). The gospel is a "call," which means that it imposes obligation upon all who hear it.

The second particle in the eye is in the errant test of faith so commonly represented by both Arminians and Fullerites. As with their claim that God loves all men, it is a mantra with them to say that the way to salvation is by believing on Jesus *as personal savior*. Even those who do not use this exact wording are oftentimes confused by the same underlying ideas. This confusion can pertain to Calvinists as well as Arminians. Now the seemingly insignificant clause "as personal savior" is *nowhere* found in scripture, and for very good reasons.

To prove it is a distracting addition, consider the fact that many a Christian has been so disappointed with himself as to doubt his own salvation, yet in his downcast state, he had no doubts whatsoever about Jesus or about scriptural representations of Him, nor did the doubter lack any love for Jesus. The man was only disgusted with himself, and found it incredible that God could save such a sinner. Now any feeling Fullerite would not hesitate in this case to reassure the doubting brother, and I think most Arminians would do the same. This proves the test of faith is not what they elsewhere represent it to be. The man doubts whether Jesus is his personal savior, but has no doubts whatsoever about Jesus. Next, consider a man who is absolutely confident that Jesus is his personal savior, but he thinks Jesus cast out devils by Beelzebub (Mt 12:24-32), or says Jesus is not truly divine. Any Fullerite or Arminian would justifiably say in this case that the man's confidence is delusional.

The point is that the biblical test of faith is not subjective. It is not about what a man thinks of himself or his standing relative to Jesus. The test of faith is *objective*. It is about what the sinner thinks of Jesus Christ. When the test of faith is altered to believing on Jesus *as personal savior*, it then calls upon the unsaved man to believe something that is not true in order to make it true. This is not sensible. Accordingly, if this were the true test, there would be no wrongdoing on the part of a wicked man for rejecting it. In truth, Jesus is not his personal savior, and the man simply submits to this truth when rejecting the presumed test of faith. The reason he exacerbates his condemnation in rejecting Christ is that the gospel calls upon him to believe objective facts about the Savior. The Bible does not promise a man salvation for believing he is saved. It promises him salvation for believing on Jesus. When penitent sinners are brought to believe that Jesus is *the* solution for sin, the Bible then promises them that Jesus is *their* solution for sin. Further, their obligation to believe on Jesus is not contingent upon Jesus being their personal savior. Rather, the promise that Jesus is their personal savior is contingent upon them believing on Jesus. This errant test of faith confounds the terms of assurance with the assurance itself.

Now the facts that Jesus is the Son of God, the Christ, resurrected from the dead, the sole Savior of sinners, etc. are simple and *objective* realities that are incumbent upon all rational minds. All men are obligated to believe them, even as they are obligated to believe the sky is blue and the ocean is wet. Obviously, men are obligated to believe anything that is true, and they are

unreasonable to suppose there is any merit in so doing. Now the scriptures declare that all professed sinners who believe these proclamations are the undeserving beneficiaries of the death of Jesus Christ, which naturally follows from the fact that their belief is itself such a benefit. The scriptures also resolutely declare that non-elect will never believe these things, and it is upon this basis that true belief in Jesus Christ is a sure mark of eternal salvation. Most importantly, there is *absolutely nothing* in this reasoning that would necessitate or endorse universal atonement. The “as personal savior” clause obscures reasoning on this point, and I suspect it was well-calculated to do so, as it prejudices minds toward universal atonement, along with other particles for the eye, such as substituting “offer” for the scriptural term “call.”

To claim that Jesus died in any sense for the eternal salvation of the non-elect presents Him as being irrational. It also obscures His deity. If Christ were truly the Second Person in the Godhead, He surely knew that the non-elect would never be saved. Even if salvation were conditional, as the Arminians claim, He still knew exactly who would meet the conditions and who would not. Yet, these bizarre doctrines have Him knowingly committing Himself to an exercise in futility by dying for the salvation of men He absolutely knew would never be saved. Also, after He plainly declared that He and His Father were necessarily of the same mind (Jn 5:19-20), Fullerism says that the Father denied Christ’s aspiration to save all men by electing only a subset. Now if Christ died for men who in the end will be justly damned, then we can be sure that, as a rational being and as omniscient God, He either died to damn them or else died to make their damnation just. Both ideas are shown to be absurd by scripture (Jn 3:17-22).

However, many among both Arminians and Calvinists have thought God would be unreasonable to call upon men to believe a message so adverse to their wicked minds as to make their belief of it impossible. This has led some Calvinists to the errant conclusion that the gospel has no call whatsoever to the non-elect, and that the non-elect are under no obligation to believe it. Those making this argument elsewhere contend that the condemnation of man was the consequence of God imposing upon him a law he was unable to obey. So they affirm in this case the same principle to which they objected in the former. There is in fact nothing unusual about God putting unattainable objectives before men. He commands them to seek Him, but none will completely find Him. He has put them all in a perpetual struggle for satisfaction, but none fully achieve it. He has given them all a compulsive instinct to survive, yet they all ultimately fail in the struggle. He has given them inquisitive, exploratory minds, but also a Universe they will never be able to comprehend. Men are limited and bounded in their pursuit of all these objectives “*that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him,*” (Acts 17:27). That is, these divinely appointed boundaries and limitations cause men to look to Him in their desire to achieve these otherwise unattainable ends.

Scriptures also show that God is very much in the habit of sending His preached word even where He knows it will be rejected (Isa 53:1, Ezek 3:1-7, Jer 1:17-19, Mt 23:34, Acts 7:52). He does this to render men without excuse and to demonstrate their corrupt, unworthy natures. He has done this under both the Law and the gospel. While the death of Christ was intended only to save, and not to condemn, this cannot be said of His gospel. Rather, it is for judgment “*that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind,*” (Jn 9:39). Also He “*will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute: That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this*

generation,” (Lk 11:49,50). The gospel is unto God “*a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life,*” (2Cor 2:15-16). Verily, it is unto the wicked “*an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God,*” (Phil 1:28).

The only qualification on the gospel call is what Jesus stated Himself: “*I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance,*” (Lk 5:32). By this He clearly meant those who *acknowledge* their sinfulness because all men are sinners in fact. As to the self-righteous, the gospel is still preached to them as a warning but it makes no blessed promises.

One text commonly abused by Fullerites on this subject is: “*For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe,*” (1Tim 4:10). Fullerites effectively insert a word in this text that the Holy Spirit did not authorize. The text does not say that God is the *potential* savior of all men but that He is *in fact* savior. The meaning is that He is savior of all men in a *temporal* sense, and He is savior of believers in an *eternal* sense. Had Christ not died on the cross, the world would have been incinerated long ago, so even the wicked have benefited from Him in this sense and in many others, but only in *temporal* respects.

The following analogy will illustrate the points I have attempted to make in this section: A country under imminent foreign threat may *call* all of its young men to military service. Those who refuse the call will be chargeable with rebellion; hence, the call is not an *offer* or *invitation*. Nor is it an offer even if there will be compensation for those in compliance. Nor does the fact of compensation change the obligation to obey the call, nor does the provision of compensation transform the call into a call unto compensation. It is rather a call unto duty, and the obligation imposed by the call is irrespective of whatever compensation is made, though compensation will no doubt invigorate the young soldiers in pursuing the interests of their country and its glory. Accordingly, the right of the country to make this call is not contingent upon its willingness to compensate, but derives solely and sufficiently from its authority as a sovereign.

In similar manner, the call of the gospel is not an offer because those refusing to comply will be held accountable. Nor is it a call unto compensation. It is rather a call unto duty, and is indeed a call that “*commandeth all men every where to repent,*” (Acts 17:30). Though compliance to the call will be blessed with the assurance of eternal life and with temporal benefits deriving from the same, the obligation to obey the call is not contingent on this. It is not, strictly speaking, a call to believe on Jesus *as personal savior*, because the obligation to obey it would not be diminished even if He were not personal savior. What God has declared concerning Him are objective realities to which all rational minds are liable. God has right to call upon every man to believe these facts with or without reward. Assent to these facts is therefore no less obligatory to one man than it is to another, and belief of them does nothing to merit compensation.

The Pseudo-Logic of Fullerism

Fullerism appears reasonable to some at first glance, but logically collapses under scrutiny. I am not aware of any widely accepted doctrinal system that fares worse in this respect. Problems begin with its common claim that the death of Christ is “sufficient for all but efficient only for

the elect.” Judging from the frequency with which this statement is made, it is evidently considered by many to be profound, whereas it is in fact a contradiction within itself, and should therefore serve as clue that something is amiss. If a doctor were to present a patient with a pill, claiming it to be sufficient for all infirmities, but effective only for indigestion, then the patient should surely suspect quackery. But even upon laying this objection aside, the statement is totally vacuous. Who could doubt that the death of Christ is sufficient for the salvation of the Devil had it been intended to such end? The issue of course is the *intent* of His death. Now since it was purposed and planned in the mind of an omniscient God, and since the final effect of it is the salvation of the elect only, then one can be sure this is exactly what it was intended to do.

The next problem is in its reasoning concerning the presumed “free offer.” They say there is a free and general offer of Christ to all men, and this they consider to be a foundational doctrine. They reason that a general offer cannot be sensible without a general atonement, and this is because their system is tacitly built upon the following syllogism:

- 1) All who believe on Christ are eternally saved.
 - 2) If any non-elect were to believe on Christ, he too would be saved.
 - 3) None can be saved without the death of Christ.
- Therefore, Christ died for all non-elect.

The first premise is not to be denied. It is heartily affirmed by both allies and adversaries of Calvinism. The second premise is purely hypothetical. Even Fullerites acknowledge this. No man will believe on Christ while in the bondage of his depraved nature, but the proposed theory says that *if he did*, he too would be saved. Calvinism is oftentimes charged with denying this. Critics will characterize the doctrine as teaching that even if the non-elect were to believe, repent and obey, they would be rejected nonetheless on account of being non-elect. The truth is one will scarcely find any Calvinistic creed making such claims. Rather, they simply state that the non-elect *will not* believe, repent and obey. What would happen if they did may be of some theoretical interest, but it is of no practical relevance. Notwithstanding this, we will concede the second premise here for the sake of reason. The third premise is of course the very foundation of Christianity, so we happily acknowledge it too. Thus, we grant all three of the premises. Are we then bound to the conclusion?

In fact we are not, because the syllogism contains a subtle but significant error. Since the second premise is conditional, the conclusion must inherit the same condition. Hence, the proper conclusion would be that if any non-elect person believed on Christ, then Christ died for that non-elect person. Now this is a far cry from the claim that Christ died for *all* non-elect, and since Fullerites acknowledge that non-elect *never* believe on Christ, the syllogism does not prove He died with the intent of saving *any* of them.

The error of the syllogism can be seen from the following example:

- 1) All fish are swimmers.
 - 2) If a cactus were a fish, it too would be a swimmer.
 - 3) None can swim without being in water.
- Therefore, all cacti are in water.

Obviously, something is very amiss with this syllogism, yet it is structured exactly as the first. Again, the problem with both syllogisms is that the second premise is conditional but the condition is abandoned when leaping to the conclusion. The proper conclusion is that if a cactus were a fish, then it would be in water.

Fullerism errs in pursuing a foolish and unlearned question (2Tim 2:23), then errs again by making careless assumptions while venturing into its strictly hypothetical world. It acknowledges that non-elect will never believe in the real world, but meddles with the question of what would happen if they did. Its advocates could readily see that it is a childish question to ask what would happen if a man could jump over Mount Everest, but fail to acknowledge that one question is as irrelevant as the other. Then when it ventures into its imaginary world where depravity no longer pertains, and where non-elect potentially believe, it carries with it assumptions that it cannot prove to be valid. Indeed, the imaginary world being entertained so radically differs from reality that it would be precarious to maintain almost any of the assumptions we would otherwise feel safe in making. For example, it is ordinarily safe to assume that men are made of flesh, but this assumption becomes precarious in the scenario where they are designed to jump over Mount Everest. To give another example, if one assumes an earth with no rain, he cannot continue to assume an earth covered in grass. But Fullerism dispenses with depravity in the hypothetical case it considers while retaining the concept of election. The fact is that we cannot know that election would even pertain in that case. The scheme of salvation might have been entirely different had this imaginary world been real. Our purpose is to determine the intents of the crucifixion in the real world, not in a fantasy land.

Remarkably, there are some Fullerites who concede the illogic of their position, but who in stupendous stubbornness continue to defend it, claiming that God's logic is different from man's logic, so that what is contradictory to man can be consistent to God. Even were we to concede their premise, a distinction must be made between a seemingly contradictory revelation and a contradictory *explanation* of a revelation. If the latter were valid, then anything could be made to mean nothing. This point by itself is sufficient to reject their doctrine. But even the premise is untenable, because it would take some degree of logic to even establish that the two logical systems were different, so having supposedly established a difference, how could we know that the logic we used was in fact God's logic? This leaves us exposed to the dubious conclusion that God's logic could be different from man's logic when measured by man's logic, but equal to man's logic when measured by God's logic! This is preposterous.

The first commandment in the Decalogue was that men were to have no other gods. Had it been left at this, then carnal men would have simply redefined the one true God to suit themselves. So God gave two more commandments to prevent this. The second prohibited images of Himself. The third prohibited that His name be taken in vain. These together say, in effect, that men are neither to make their own visible representations of Him nor their own verbal representations of Him. As we survey the multitude of man-made gods and religions across the history of the globe, we can surely see the motivation for these commandments. None of those man-made gods or religions were even in the same galaxy with the truth. Because the true God is incomprehensible and unacceptable to natural men, He has prohibited any representations apart

from those He has authorized Himself. He then presented to us the Lord Jesus Christ and His word as the visible and verbal representations through which deity is to be understood.

This means there is no better measure of God's logic than the one provided by Jesus Christ Himself. Now it happens that never do we find the Son of God endorsing any contradiction, absurdity or impracticality. Further, no scriptural teacher scathed men more for inconsistency and absurdity than did Jesus Christ. Also, while we find that He commonly adduced scripture in His defense, it is also true that in many of His arguments He quoted no scripture at all, but reasoned entirely from logic. A journey through the book of Matthew alone discloses a formidable list of such instances: Mt 9:4-6, 15-17, 10:24-31, 11:16-19, 12:11-12, 12:25-28, 18:21-35, 20:13-15, 21:28-31, 23:16-26, 25:26-27, 26:10, 26:52-55. Indeed, Jesus Christ rates as the most sensible and practical religious teacher of all time, and on this basis, we must utterly reject the illogic of Fullerism, including the illogic with which it defends its own illogic.

The Dishonesty of Fullerism

While the greater part of Fullerites are honest, sincere men, this is not true of all, and the honest element has naively put too much confidence in the representations of the dishonest. Further, regardless of what may be said in defense of the character of its advocates, Fullerism is itself a dishonest doctrine. It invites the non-elect to believe on Christ as potential savior, whereas the doctrine actually denies any real possibility of Him being such. Thus it calls upon the non-elect to believe a thing that it does not even believe itself. The doctrine publicly represents God as desiring the salvation of all men, but it secretly presents Him as being convicted in the case of some but indifferent in the case of others. Further, it makes subtle changes to the word of God that are well-crafted to prejudice minds to accept these dubious claims.

But perhaps the worst part is how the doctrine is commonly used to cater to the errors of men rather than teaching them better. There are many preachers in the modern world who will privately acknowledge that the Bible is a highly Calvinistic book, but the problem is that modern society is highly Arminian and tends to loathe Calvinistic principles. So a preacher aspiring to a large congregation has strong incentive to conceal his Calvinistic tendencies, and Fullerism serves him very well to this effect. By preaching the free offer and general atonement, most in his congregation will be left to think that all tenets of their beloved Arminian prejudices are being endorsed, whereas the more astute hearers can be appeased with a private conversation in the preacher's office where he will be more forthright about his Calvinistic compliance.

To further allay his conscience in this, the preacher will pretend to himself that Calvinism is an esoteric doctrine, and that universal atonement and the free offer are pabulum for the public. The problem here is that the strongest teachings in the Bible on these matters were actually in letters written by the Apostles to New Testament churches consisting mostly of recent converts whose backgrounds in paganism had left them almost total strangers to the Bible. The truth is that *any* church in America today *should* be far better prepared to receive these doctrines than the ones to whom they were originally taught.

The scale of deception facilitated by Fullerism has been massive among Baptists. The strong majority of modern Baptist laity are outright Arminian except for the doctrine of eternal

preservation, and some have denied even this. These same Baptists would be shocked to know that the official, historical doctrine of their churches, as expressed even by their local church confessions and creeds, endorses total depravity, unconditional election, and irresistible grace. On the other hand, Andrew Fuller would himself be shocked to know what the effects of his doctrine have been on Baptists. Fuller was sufficiently Calvinistic that he would now be judged as a heretic by his own dupes. Fullerism has doubtlessly proven to be one of the greatest stumbling-blocks in Baptist history, and it is for this reason that the ancient Primitive Baptists are to be thanked for rejecting it.

Finally, Fullerites have commonly been dishonest in their representations of history. Their usual story is that Andrew Fuller arrived at his doctrine out of concern for the alleged stagnation in Particular Baptist churches in England in the midst of the Great Awakening. He is praised for delivering Baptists from the errors of so-called “hyper-Calvinism” and jump-starting them into a state of revival. However, the alleged state of hyper-Calvinism is distorted and grossly exaggerated, and little mention is made of how Baptist churches in America were rapidly growing notwithstanding the fact that their doctrine was essentially the same as in England. Besides, if limited atonement has the stifling effects that are accused, then how could one possibly account for the earth-shaking Reformation?

There is absolutely no doubt that the primary target of Fullerites has been the English Baptist minister John Gill, who they make out to be the chief apostle of what they call “hyper-Calvinism” and its accused effects. They will scarcely speak of the alleged redemptive effects of Fuller’s doctrine without traducing the name of Gill. This is inexcusable because the writings of John Gill have been readily available for a century. If Fullerites will make such claims of a man whose published writings are so readily available to expose their exaggerations and false accusations, then how much less compunction toward others? I will finish this section with quotes from Gill’s commentary that plainly show he was not what Fullerites accuse:

On Mk 16:15 (“...*Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature*”):

...not only into Judea, and through all the cities of it, where they had been before confined; nor only into the Roman empire, which is sometimes so called, because great part of the world was under that government; but into every known and habitable part of the whole universe, to all the nations of the world under heaven... and besides, this commission not only included the Apostles, but reaches to all the ministers of the Gospel in succeeding ages, to the end of the world

On Acts 17:30 (“...*God... commandeth all men every where to repent*”):

...he hath given orders, that the doctrine of repentance, as well as remission of sins, should be preached to all nations, to Gentiles as well as Jews; and that it becomes them to repent of their idolatries, and turn from their idols, and worship the one, only, living and true God... Repentance being represented as a command, does not suppose it to be in the power of men, or contradict evangelical repentance, being the free grace gift of God, but only shows the need men stand in of it, and how necessary and requisite it is; and when it is said to be a command to all, this does not destroy its being a special blessing of the covenant of grace to some; but points out the sad condition that all men are in as sinners, and that without repentance they must perish...

On Col 1:28 (“...*warning every man, and teaching every man... that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus*”):

warning every man; of his lost state and condition by nature; of the wrath to come, and the danger he is in of it; of the terrors of the Lord, and of an awful judgment; showing sinners that they are unrighteous and unholy, that their nature is corrupt and impure, their best righteousness imperfect, and cannot justify them before God; that they stand guilty before him, and that destruction and misery are in all their ways; and therefore advise them to flee from the wrath to come, to the hope set before them in the Gospel: and teaching every man in all wisdom; not natural, but spiritual and evangelical; the whole Gospel of Christ, the counsel of God, the wisdom of God in a mystery, and all the branches of it; teaching them to believe in Christ for salvation, to lay hold on his righteousness for justification, to deal with his blood for pardon, and with his sacrifice for the atonement of their sins; and to observe all things commanded by Christ, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly: by these two words, "warning" and "teaching," the several parts of the Gospel ministry are expressed; and which extend to all sorts of men, rich and poor, bond and free, greater and lesser sinners, Gentiles as well as Jews; and who are chiefly designed here, and elsewhere, by every man and every creature: that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus...

REGENERATION

The most distinguishing aspect of Primitive Baptist doctrine relative to other forms of Calvinism is in the doctrine of regeneration. All Calvinists agree that men are by nature dead in sin and dead to all that is spiritual. The doctrine of regeneration is about how they are quickened spiritually or, equivalently, “born again” or “effectually called.” Calvinists of all kinds correctly affirm that regeneration is necessary to eternal salvation; that it is produced by an irresistible operation of the Holy Spirit, and that is therefore altogether of divine grace. Primitive Baptists add to these claims that it is also a *direct operation* of the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, this view is oftentimes called “immediate regeneration” because it claims the Holy Spirit regenerates without mediation. Most Calvinists and all Arminians disagree, saying that the Holy Spirit regenerates by means of scriptural instruction, and might add other means besides these (e.g. sacraments). Hence, it is common for them to speak of preachers, teachers, scriptures, etc. as being *means* or *instruments* unto spiritual life. Such claims have not been made by all Calvinists. A significant number of them have agreed with Primitive Baptists that regeneration is immediate, but such were a minority within their respective denominations.

However, the scriptural case for immediate regeneration is very strong, and for this reason, the recent resurgence in Calvinism seems to have been accompanied by growing acceptance of immediate regeneration also. It should also be noted that practically all Calvinists acknowledge immediate regeneration in part, which they do when explaining how infants and mentally-impaired people are born again. They might also apply it to cases of other unevangelized elect. However, they consider all such cases to be exceptional divine operations, and believe the *ordinary* means of spiritual quickening to be via scriptural instruction. This is where Primitive Baptists disagree. They say there may be varying methods and degrees of conversion, practical sanctification, and of the temporal realization and assurance of eternal life, but they say all men are spiritually quickened by the same method and to the same degree.

Indeed, one can state generally the primary difference between Primitive Baptist doctrine and conventional Calvinism in the terms of this discussion. Conventional Calvinism is a *means-dependent* system. Primitive Baptist doctrine is *means-independent* system. Conventional Calvinists believe that scriptures, preachers, etc. are means or instruments to both the vital and legal sides of eternal salvation. Primitive Baptists deny both. They acknowledge that such things are means to conversion, practical sanctification and assurance, but deny that men are spiritually quickened through them or rendered righteous before God. These things are done by God alone without qualification. This chapter will discuss the issue as it applies to the vital side of salvation. The next chapter will consider the legal.

English Baptists on Regeneration

While the ancient English Baptists commonly stated a means-dependent or instrumental view of regeneration in their creeds, other writings show a greater tendency to the immediate regeneration position. In some cases, no other possibility seems to be admitted by their logic. But it is not always easy to draw precise conclusions about their views, partly because their terminology sometimes differed from ours.

The term “regeneration” itself is a potential example of this. To advocates of immediate regeneration, this word simply refers to the impartation of spiritual life. It does not in any sense refer to the motions deriving from such life. Rather, regeneration ends prior to the very point where the motions of life begin. Belief in Jesus Christ is considered to be such a motion, and is therefore considered to be an *effect* of regeneration. However, English Baptists and other Calvinists have not consistently applied this narrow definition, so that “regeneration” in their language at times embraced the act of believing and at other times did not.

Ambiguities can also surround the expression “word of God.” Complications here derive from the fact that spiritual life is intelligent life that is capable of learning. Cognitive science indicates that knowledge cannot be added to a vacuum, but must be built upon preexisting knowledge. A head that begins empty must forever remain empty. While “word of God” can obviously refer to external information offered to the intelligent mind, the mind could not capture it and learn from it without innate, preexisting intelligence and information. Hence, “word of God” could also refer to something that is innate to the spiritual mind, being put in it directly by God in the work of regeneration. Much more will be said about this in a later section entitled “Primitive Baptist Views Concerning Faith.” When one affirms or denies that a man is born again by means of the “word of God,” his intended meaning may not always be clear.

Finally, the word “saved” can have ambiguities. Most commonly it is taken to mean “regenerated and justified,” but this is not what the term always means in scripture or even in theological language. Any man who is regenerated and justified is of course bound for heaven, but the Bible is not apt to describe him as “saved” unless he is also personally assured of this through his knowledge and belief of Jesus Christ. This is why New Testament scriptures do not describe Old Testament saints as being “saved,” even though they are of course now in heaven.

Such ambiguities become a hindrance when interpreting John Gill (1697-1771), the renown English Baptist commentator. Scholars have questioned where John Gill finally stood on regeneration. Did he believe in immediate regeneration or did he believe the preached gospel to be instrumental in the work? His commentary would generally suggest the latter, but his Body of Divinity, which was his final work, leaves the issue open, as may be seen by:

The instrumental cause of regeneration, if it may be so called, are the word of God, and the ministers of it; hence regenerate persons are said to be *born again by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever* (1 Pet. 1:23), and again, *of his own will begat he us with the word of truth* (James 1:18), unless by the Word in these passages should be meant the Eternal Logos, or essential Word of God, Christ Jesus, since logos is used in both places; though ministers of the gospel are not only represented as ministers and instruments by whom others believe, but as spiritual fathers; *though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ*, says the apostle to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 4:15), *yet have ye not many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel*; so he speaks of his son Onesimus, whom he had *begotten in his bonds* (Philemon 1:10) yet this instrumentality of the word in regeneration seems not so agreeable to the principle of grace implanted in the soul in regeneration, and to be understood with respect to that; since that is done by immediate infusion, and is represented as a creation; and now as God made no use of any instrument in the first and old creation, so neither does it seem so agreeable that he should use any in the new creation: wherefore this is rather to be understood of the exertion of the principle of grace, and the drawing it forth into act and exercise; which is excited and encouraged by the ministry of the word, by which it appears that a man is born again; so the three thousand

first converts, and the jailor, were first regenerated, or had the principle of grace wrought in their souls by the Spirit of God, and then were directed and encouraged by the ministry of the apostles to repent and believe in Christ: whereby it became manifest that they were born again... – (p 533-534)

Add to this what Gill said in his chapter on effectual calling and the role of the preached word:

Though effectual calling may be distinguished from regeneration, taken more strictly, for the first infusion and implantation of grace in the heart; yet it is closely connected with it...

When Gill spoke of “regeneration” before, he meant what he here labels “effectual calling,” and this moved him to redefine regeneration “more strictly” to achieve distinction. Under the new definition, regeneration appears to be immediate. As to effectual calling, he said:

And besides this, there is a more special and particular call of men, and not so general, and is either external or internal: the *external* call is by the ministry of the word... The *internal* call is by the Spirit and grace of God to the hearts and consciences of men; these two sometimes go together, but not always; some are externally called, and not internally called; and of those that are internally called, some are called by and through the ministry of the word, and some without it; though, for the most part, men are called by it...

The internal call is next to be considered, which is sometimes immediately, and without the ministry of the word... and sometimes mediately by the word. – (p 538-541)

This implies that Gill took effectual calling, or what was formerly regeneration, as being immediate in some cases.

Next consider his comments on conversion where he made exactly the same distinction between conversion and regeneration that is made by advocates of immediate regeneration:

Conversion, though it may seem, in some respects, to fall in with regeneration and the effectual calling, yet may be distinguished from them both. Regeneration is the sole act of God; conversion consists both of God’s act upon men, in turning them, and of acts done by men under the influence of converting grace; they turn, being turned. Regeneration is the motion of God towards and upon the heart of a sinner; conversion is the motion of a sinner towards God, as one (Charnock) expresses it. In regeneration men are wholly passive, as they also are in the first moment of conversion; but by it become active: it is therefore sometimes expressed passively... – (p 545)

Proponents of immediate regeneration typically define “conversion” as the turning of the regenerated mind to the word of God as presented to it externally. These advocates commonly complain that the instrumental view confounds regeneration with conversion. Gill here defined these terms almost exactly as adherents of immediate regeneration would have them.

These quotes show that John Gill was not totally committed on this subject. In the first quote, he claimed that the word of God and ministers are instrumental causes of regeneration, yet he qualified the expression “instrumental cause” by saying “if it may be so called,” as though he had reservations about such words. Then he was uncommitted as to the meaning of the term

“word” in critical texts, not being sure if this meant the word as externally preached or Christ Himself. Next he presented a strong case for immediate regeneration, and argued that the ministry of the word is actually the means whereby it “appears” that a man is born again. At this point, it is not clear that Gill’s previous use of the term “instrument” was intended with the same meaning as most Calvinists. His argument was essentially that the preached word is the instrument of *revealing* regeneration, though not of actually effecting it. Then in subsequent chapters on effectual calling and conversion, his explanations further removed the role of the preached word in regeneration, and removed it altogether for some cases.

So what does one make of this? It is possible that “instrument” was never intended by Gill to convey the same idea as most Calvinists, in which event, one could credibly say that Gill endorsed immediate regeneration. But there is also ambiguity in what he meant by “regeneration,” and under the broadest sense in which he could have intended the term, he believed it was sometimes immediate but usually not. So which side of the argument can claim him? When answering this question, it should be considered that if a man involves the preached word to any degree in the work of regeneration, then he may technically be considered an instrumental regenerationist. Hence, a man may present so much scripture and logic supporting immediate regeneration that one could say 99% of his argument was disposed to such, yet the slightest involvement of the preached word would, technically speaking, place him under the “instrumental regenerationist” label. In like manner, if a glass of water contained one molecule of foreign substance, then technically it would not be pure, even though for all practical purposes it would. Therefore, a man could draw water from a mud hole and claim with some technical propriety that he had the same kind of water as in the glass just named, but this would be most misleading to anyone wanting a drink.

This analogy expresses the attitude Primitive Baptists have generally had toward John Gill and other English Baptists on the subject of regeneration. Modern Baptists, whether of Arminian or Calvinistic bent, who say the preached word is causative or instrumental in regeneration, have claimed kinship with historical Baptists on this point, yet the comparison is much like that of the two glasses of water I just described. Primitive Baptists believe that the general sentiment of the old literature does much more to favor immediate regeneration. Hence, the Primitive Baptist historian, Sylvester Hassell, stated, “In careless expressions some Baptists have advanced this error, but the same men, when taking into consideration the entire teaching of the Scriptures on this point, have, in their more exact expressions, repudiated it.” (*Questions and Answers*). By “this error” Hassell meant instrumental regeneration. Hassell’s claim was based partly in the fact that English Baptists and other Calvinistic writers could lay argument upon argument implying immediate regeneration, but then inexplicably endorse the instrumental view in the end.

To further illustrate the indecision of English Baptists on this point, consider the following quote from William Rushton concerning his personal experience. This is found in Particular Redemption, a book from 1831 in which he ably refuted Fullerism:

Another circumstance which used sometimes to be suggested, though not deeply, was, that I professed to be born again, without the instrumentality of the Word; whereas the scriptures seemed to me, when speaking of regeneration, to trace it to the Word of God as the means. Although it was rather the providence, than the Word of God, which I trust was made instrumental in my conviction, yet there is an expression of the apostle Peter which is sufficient to

quiet such fears as those. In 1 Peter 3:1, where the inspired writer is exhorting wives to be in subjection to their own husbands, he says, that if any obey not the Word, they also may, without the Word, be won by the conversation of the wives.

Rushton obviously was not committed to a view of instrumental regeneration, and considered himself to be an exception to it. This further suggests that English Baptists, though generally very sound, simply had not thoroughly worked through this issue, nor does it appear to have been of pressing concern to them. Rushton claimed to have been troubled by it, “though not deeply.”

On the other hand, another English Baptist minister named Samuel Richardson took a stronger view in his treatise “Justification by Christ Alone” (1647). Richardson was a signer of the 1646 London Baptist Confession. The subject of his paper was justification and not regeneration, so I will be cautious not to conclusively attribute any view to him on the latter; however, the principles he sets forth, if consistently applied, would necessitate immediate regeneration. In what follows, Richardson considers various objections to his view that faith manifests a righteous state and is not a cause or means to it:

Objection: The Scripture does not say that any shall be saved but such as believe, therefore *faith is essential to salvation*.

Answer: No more do the Scripture say that any shall be saved but such as *obey him*: 2 Thes. 1:8, 9; Heb. 11:14, and 5:9; Prov. 28:18; Matt. 19:17, 23; John 14:23. Who can do this? It will follow by your reason that good works *are absolutely necessary to salvation and perseverance to the knowledge of it*, because the Scripture says, “*He that continues to the end shall be saved,*” Mark 13:3, as well as “*he that believes shall be saved,*” (John 3:16) and so when men have persevered to the end of their days they may know it.

Secondly, the Scripture declares unbelief to be a sin, and that the sins of the elect shall not deprive them of the love of God nor salvation, Psal. 89:28-39 with Rom. 8:33-39. What the Lord has purchased for His, they shall enjoy in His time because “*he is faithful that hath promised it,*” Heb. 10:23. If “*we believe not, yet he abideth faithful, he cannot deny himself:*” as 2 Tim. 2:13. And if “*not any thing shall separate them from the love of God,*” unbelief shall not, Rom. 8.

Objection: But God has decreed the means as well as the end, and faith is one of the means.

Answer:

1. We grant God has decreed the end and the means, and whatsoever God has decreed shall unavoidably come to pass.
2. But we deny that faith is any means of our Redemption, Justification, or Salvation. *Nothing but the Lord Jesus Christ is the means of our salvation.*
3. There are means that are necessary to the *revealing and enjoying the comfort of it*, as the Holy Spirit, and as Ministers to reveal it, and faith to receive it.
4. Also there be fruits and *effects of the love of God*, and calling, etc., as faith, love, and *our obedience to Christ*, which all those who are the Lord’s, prize in their place, *yet these are no means of our salvation.*

Hence, Richardson denied that faith is in any sense a means to salvation, by which he obviously meant salvation to heaven, yet this would imply that the preached word is no means either, because it surely is of no profit except it be mixed with faith in them that hear it (Heb 4:2). Also,

Richardson's bold proclamation that "nothing but the Lord Jesus Christ is the means of our salvation" is an exact statement of what all Primitive Baptists believe, provided that he included the quickening work of the Holy Spirit in this statement, which he no doubt did.

The London Baptist Confession of 1689 generally contended for instrumental regeneration, but did not demand it in all cases, as can be seen in section 14.1 where saving faith is said to be "ordinarily" wrought by the ministry of the word. Also, it added important qualification in:

20.4 Although the gospel be the only outward means of revealing Christ and saving grace, and is, as such, abundantly sufficient thereunto; yet that men who are dead in trespasses may be born again, quickened or regenerated, there is moreover necessary an effectual insuperable work of the Holy Spirit upon the whole soul, for the producing in them a new spiritual life; without which no other means will effect their conversion unto God.

The "insuperable work of the Holy Spirit" is clearly to be distinguished from the "outward means" of the gospel. The gospel is also described as "sufficient" as opposed to being necessary.

John Brine (1703-1765), who is commonly considered second only to Gill for theological prominence among the English Baptists, expressed views on regeneration that are indistinguishable from the immediate regeneration position of Primitive Baptists. This is seen in:

God alone, and entirely is the Author of Regeneration, which thus appears: It is the Infusion, Creation, and begetting of a new Life and Principle in the Hearts of Men. – (The Certain Efficacy of the Death of Christ, "Regeneration")

Regeneration is the infusion of a new principle of spiritual life. Naturally men are dead in trespasses and sins, and, therefore, in order to their acting in a holy and spiritual manner, a living holy principle must be communicated to them. – (A Treatise on Various Subjects, Ch 3)

In the latter work, Brine complained of religious corruption in his day saying:

Again, the terms irresistible and effectual grace, are never heard. Aids, assistances, operations of grace, and divine impulses, are spoken of with great freedom. By this means, some who ascribe the whole of their Regeneration to the grace and spirit of God, are persuaded to think that so the preacher means; but it is wholly a mistake; and he has others about him who are well aware of it, and applaud his imposing art. – (Ch 11)

It would be difficult to reconcile this last statement with any form of instrumental regeneration.

The upshot of all this is that English Baptists could be found on both sides of the argument. The greater number of them likely claimed that the preached word is an instrument of regeneration, though they also made the same strong arguments for depravity and human inability that Primitive Baptists consider to be proof of immediate regeneration. The issue does seem to be a point of passion with English Baptists, which likely explains why their thought and terminology sometimes lacked precision that later controversies would demand.

A Defense of Primitive Baptists On Regeneration

As controversy is the usual means of correcting theological ambiguity and naivete, the Primitive Baptist descendants of these English Baptists were moved by controversy to resolve questions concerning the role of the preached word in regeneration. This occurred with the introduction of Fullerism in the late 1700s and early 1800s and its subsequent descent into virtual Arminianism. During this time, the concept of human means became a point of obsession, and it was routinely taught that the salvation of the whole unevangelized world was suspended on human effort and money. This of course was partly done in the belief that it would motivate people to support the mission movement. So it became a case where the end was seen as justifying the mean. However, this movement was accompanied by doctrinal corruption that early English Baptists would have found difficult to imagine. It also had pervasive effects among other reformed denominations. It became so extensive that Sylvester Hassell would say as of the early 20th century, "All denominations of the present day, except the Old School or Primitive Baptists, advocate Arminianism in some of its alluring and plausible forms," (Questions and Answers). This will seem to be an overstatement by some, but it must be considered that the Arminian frenzy was of such extent that even churches with Calvinistic creeds were preaching Arminianism from the pulpit. Add to this the fact that Hassell considered instrumental regeneration to be an Arminian idea, even if advocated by a self-professed Calvinist. Since Hassell's times, Calvinism has seen a revival in some sectors, though the idea of human means in eternal salvation remains prominent.

The following quote from John Leland (1754-1841) well-expressed the epidemic of Arminianism that invaded the Baptist denomination in those days, and which remains unto the present. Leland is recognized by all Baptists as one of their greatest preachers in the history of America. He is said to have influenced the writing of the Constitution of this nation, and tradition has it that he was urged by some to seek the Presidency. Most modern Baptists are probably unaware that he was heart-sickened in his later years upon seeing the corruption of the Baptist body with instrumental regeneration and departures in church practice. Though he was not present at the Black Rock meeting in which Primitive Baptists, after decades of enduring these departures, resolved to part ways with them, he endorsed their action by letter, as the minutes of that meeting will show. The following statement, quoted in Hassell's Church History, p 623, is from 1835:

I have been preaching sixty years to convince men that human powers were too degenerate to effect a change of heart by self-exertion; and all the revivals of religion that I have seen have substantially accorded with that sentiment. But now a host of preachers and people have risen up, who ground salvation on the foundation that I have sought to demolish. The world is gone after them, and their converts increase abundantly. How much error there has been in the doctrine and measures that I have advocated, I cannot say; no doubt some, for I claim not infallible inspiration. But I have not yet been convinced of any mistake so radical as to justify a renunciation of what I have believed, and adopt the new measures.

There were two primary causes for the spread of Arminianism across the Baptist body. The first was a modification of the doctrine of atonement, changing it from being particular, or for the elect only, to being intended for the entire human race. This modified Calvinism is called "Fullerism," and was discussed in the prior chapter. In the early stages, it was taught that only

the elect would appropriate the benefits of this atonement, which they would do by the power of irresistible grace, but in short time, the doctrines of unconditional election and irresistible grace were discarded and replaced with an almost pure form of Arminianism. The second cause was the notion of gospel instrumentality in regeneration. This began with the idea that the preached word is merely an instrument in the new birth, which was of course an accepted view among many English Baptists. But this was carried to its logical conclusion, namely, that all potential means to preaching, including money, mission societies and other human effort, were instruments of regeneration as well. When this idea was combined with the previously mentioned corruption, the idea that preachers are instruments in regeneration further degenerated into the idea that they are actual agents to this effect, so that salvation became as dependent upon preachers, money, mission societies and human effort as upon the very blood of Christ Himself.

This resulting corruption was rightfully rejected by historical Primitive Baptists, and their scrutiny was drawn to the catalysts that had ignited it, namely, universal atonement and instrumental regeneration. The former had never been accepted by sound Baptists. The latter had been accepted, though not without qualification. This qualification was well-justified, because the idea that preachers are means in regeneration may be demolished by several arguments, including:

1) In the very cornerstone scripture on this subject, Jn 3:3-12, the Lord stated, "*Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*" By "see" He meant "perceive" or "discern." Observe, the Lord did not say a man is born again *by* seeing the kingdom of God, as is affirmed by the Arminian position, nor did He say a man is born again *by means of* seeing the kingdom of God, as is implied by the common Calvinistic position. Rather, He said a man must be born again *in order to* see the kingdom of God. Hence, the new birth is *prerequisite* to seeing the kingdom, and is therefore prerequisite to seeing the King, because one cannot see the kingdom without also seeing the King, nor can they see the King without inferring His kingdom.

This conclusion is reinforced by use of the analogy "born." As natural birth is dictated by the parent and not the child, so spiritual birth is dictated by God and not man (Jn 1:13). As natural birth is the beginning of all natural activity, so spiritual birth is the beginning of all spiritual activity. As natural activity is impossible without natural birth, so spiritual activity is impossible without spiritual birth. This clearly implies that spiritual activity such as faith, repentance and obedience can only be the *results* of the new birth. They can never be causes or means of it.

Further, as a man surely cannot be benefited by what he is incapable of discerning, the preached word cannot contribute in the least to his regeneration. Jesus affirmed this in His reply to the resistant Nicodemus: "*If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?*" (Jn 3:12). This plainly says that unregenerate persons are in a state wherein they *cannot* believe the gospel message, even when preached by the humanity of Jesus Himself, and it is therefore a conceited claim that the preaching of any other man could serve to such effect. This reply of Jesus also shows that the assertion being made in the third verse spoke of more than *entrance* to heaven. It was an assertion of "*earthly things*" inasmuch as it explained what a man here on earth must experience in order to *believe*. A man is neither born again by believing nor by means of believing. Rather, he must be born again in order to

believe. In absence of this, he cannot believe, even if the words are uttered to his natural ear by the man Jesus Christ Himself.

This further shows the futility of the argument that says there is some magical power in scripture such that it can spiritually quicken even when all other words fail. This argument dubiously says that if Christ can quicken then so can scripture because the two are essentially the same thing. Now it was Christ Himself who asked the unbelieving Jews: “*Why do ye not understand **my** speech?*” And it was Christ Himself who answered: “*Even because ye cannot hear **my** word,*” (Jn 8:43). Any argument that attributes power to scripture that it must deny to the very words of Jesus Christ has made the scriptural *letter* an idol, and has done so in total disregard to scriptural *meaning*. The case is analogous to the error committed by Israel who turned to worshipping the brazen serpent (2Ki 18:4). It is scripture itself that said, “*But the natural man 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,*” (1Cor 2:14-15). Observe this text concerns “*the things of*” the Spirit of God – not the Spirit Himself, who obviously has sufficient power to subdue, quicken and transform *any* man, but *the things of* the Spirit, including even the scriptural letter, a man will not receive until the Spirit has so worked. This is why regeneration *must* be immediate.

But for those who would stubbornly resist these lucid principles, the Lord continued with:

That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. – Jn 3:6-9

Hence, the new birth is brought about by the *immediate* and *irresistible* force of the Spirit. Yet it is an *invisible* force that can only be ascertained by the effects it produces. These effects are the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23), the most important of which is faith. Faith is the *fruit* of the Spirit, not the *root* of the Spirit, as is so commonly claimed. Observe also that Christ here made a distinction that will prove absolutely crucial to a proper understanding of salvation. This is the distinction between *cause* and *confirmation*. The immediate operation of the Holy Spirit is the *cause*. Belief in Jesus Christ is the *confirmation*. The confounding of these concepts has been a formidable cause of much confusion in Christianity. Salvation is largely the invisible work of an invisible God. It was therefore necessary that God, for the sake of His children, accompany it with things serving to confirm its existence, yet those things, like the brazen serpent of old, have been turned into objects of worship rivaling the very God of Our Salvation.

Finally, observe the words: “*so is **every one** that is born of the Spirit.*” God does not have *ordinary* means of doing this and *extraordinary* means of doing it. He has but *one* means of doing it. The truth of immediate regeneration may be seen from the desperate measures that must be taken by all who deny it. The Arminians must hatch up ideas like the “age of accountability” to make their theories work. This is a mere strand of tape to fix a broken model. It has absolutely no scriptural support whatsoever. On the other hand, Calvinists must resort to their idea of “extraordinary means,” whereas there is not a word in scripture to support the idea that God has different means for one person than another.

It is with hesitation that I advance to other points because this one point has entirely settled the matter, and anything else might only leave opportunity for obfuscation. Notwithstanding, upon the principle that “*wisdom is justified of her children*” (Mt 11:19), I will further add:

2) In scripture where God quickened from death to life, all cases were done *immediately*, that is, without instruments or intermediaries. This occurred first in the creation, where, after forming the body of Adam from the dust of the ground, God “*breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul,*” (Gn 2:7). Bible scholars have long-believed that first occurrences in scripture were deliberately designed by the Holy Spirit to convey principles to pertain thereafter. One could not hope for an example of quickening any more immediate than this, and indeed, it would become a matter of principle in all that followed.

In the first resurrection of the Bible, recorded in 1Ki 17:21, the prophet Elijah used the peculiar methodology of stretching himself upon a dead child, thus assuming his form, as Christ did ours, and possibly also taking the form of a cross. Again, it was done in a face-to-face and immediate manner, with no instruments or intermediaries. The significance of this would be confirmed in 2Ki 4. There one will find the second resurrection in the Bible, being yet again a deceased child, and done by the hand of Elisha, but with even greater force to impress the present point. The prophet first attempted to send his servant, Gehazi, with the prophet’s staff in hand, being instructed to lay it across the face of a deceased child. Very strange to Bible history, the methodology did not succeed. So the prophet was forced to imitate his predecessor, and he “*lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child*” (2Ki 4:34), upon which the child was raised from the dead. The third Old Testament resurrection occurred in 2Ki 13, where, once again, it was immediate contact with the bones of Elisha that brought a man to life.

Now while these Old Testament resurrections were done at the hand of mortals, it is very clear that nothing in the methodology could contribute causatively to the effect produced. The significance was in the symbolism. Yet there was nothing in these events to resemble gospel preaching, baptism or any other alleged means to spiritual life. Rather, the resemblance was to what God originally did in Eden, which was very clearly an immediate operation. The failure of Elisha on his first attempt conveys the intent of this point with sufficient force to leave no reasonable doubt. God does not quicken by means of servants, and He does not quicken with use of instruments. The most precious gift of life *only* comes from Him *directly*.

Then when one observes the three resurrections done by Christ in the New Testament, exactly the same principle remains of force. Though He used the means of mud to open the eyes of the blind (Jn 9:6), and used loaves, fishes and disciples to feed the multitudes (Jn 6:11), He always raised the dead by nothing more than the power of His voice (Mk 5:40, Lk 7:14, Jn 11:43). Thus, we have seven instances of quickening prior to the resurrection of Christ, all of which powerfully conveyed the same principle.

3) Instruments are always adapted to the objects upon which they operate. Hence, a hammer is adapted to a nail; a saw is adapted to wood, and a screwdriver is adapted to a screw. But the scriptures repeatedly state that the preached word is not adapted to the natural mind (Jn 8:43-47, 1Cor 1:18, 1Cor 2:14, Rom 8:5-8); consequently, it cannot be instrumental to the regeneration of

such. The terms “means” and “instruments” occur with wearisome frequency in humanly-contrived theology, but are *never* used by scripture when addressing this subject, and such words are truly contrary to what the scriptures actually assert.

4) The scriptures clearly teach that some infants are regenerated (Ps 22:9, Mt 11:25, Mt 21:16, Lk 1:15 & 44), yet the preached word cannot be instrumental in such cases. The Bible says nothing to distinguish these cases from others, nor does it call any attention to the fact that infants are incapable of hearing a preacher, but it considers them business as usual. Further, it does not say a word about “ordinary means” or “extraordinary means” in regeneration, or in eternal salvation in general, nor does it give the slightest intimation that anyone in any period of time or any circumstance has been regenerated by alternate means. The question of infants and mental incompetents – a question that has long-troubled theologians in their futile attempts to cover both head and foot with a short sheet – was forever settled by Jesus Christ with: “*The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit,*” (Jn 3:8).

5) The idea that men are regenerated by means of scripture evidently forgets that for approximately one-third of world history there essentially was no scripture. There was little or nothing in the period from Adam to Moses that would qualify as inspired text. Objectors will surely point to the promise in Eden:

And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. – Gen 3:14-16

Obviously, this information was given by divine inspiration to Moses, the assumed author of Genesis. We cannot know that Moses could have obtained this information through oral or written tradition also. We have no proof it was knowable to any man prior to Moses apart from Adam and Eve themselves, nor can we even prove it was known to them because the words were actually spoken to the serpent. Further, while this text was definitely a prophecy of Christ, and as such, could qualify as “gospel,” nowhere does the Bible explicitly acknowledge it as being either. This is not what one would expect if the text did in fact serve the momentous role of being the sole means of regenerating men over the first third of world history.

6) Even where men were used as instruments in the scriptures, it was not to the exclusion of their credit or culpability. Hence, the Assyrians, while being merely an axe or saw in the hand of God against the rebellious Israelites (Is 10:15), were held culpable for their cruelty, and while Moses and the children of Israel were merely the instruments of God in building the tabernacle, yet it was said to be pitched by man (Heb 8:2), and was in this respect distinguished from the heavenly sanctuary which the Lord pitched Himself. As regeneration is not credited to man, but is said to be of the will of God, and is not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man (Jn 1:13), then man is neither an agent nor an instrument in its accomplishment.

7) The scriptures show that the Lord sometimes suffers the preaching of the gospel to be resisted (Mt 23:13, Mt 23:37, Lk 11:52, 1Thes 2:16, 1Thes 2:18), yet the work of the Holy Spirit in

regeneration cannot be resisted (Jn 3:8, Jn 10:16, Rom 8:29, Eph 1:5); hence, the latter cannot be limited by the former.

8) The scriptures show that the Lord suffers the preaching of the gospel to be corrupted (2Cor 2:17, Gal 1:6-9, 1Tim 6:3-5, 2Tim 2:18, 2Pet 2:1), yet the internal word preached by the Holy Spirit is not corruptible (1Pet 1:23, 1Pet 3:3-4, 1Jn 3:9). Those believing regeneration to be accomplished by means of preaching have long been perplexed as to what specific part of their message is used to achieve the instantaneous quickening. They have been equally perplexed as to what degree of doctrinal purity is necessary in the preached message for it to be effectual unto this end. If preaching were indeed the means to quickening, then surely the Bible would have addressed these critical questions. They are, however, foolish and unlearned questions that should be avoided by discarding the unscriptural ideas that inspired them (2Tim 2:23).

9) The acquisition of spiritual life is described in scripture with many analogies, including that of a *birth* (Jn 1:11-13, 3:3-8), a *quickenings* (Eph 2:1-5, Col 2:13), a *translation* (Col 1:12-13), a *resurrection* (Jn 5:25-29) and a *creation* (2Cor 5:17, Eph 2:10). Calvinists have done well to emphasize that all of these events have an active power operating on a *passive* object. Thus, that which is born does not contribute toward its own birth; that which is created does not contribute toward its own creation, and so forth. Arminians will be hard-pressed to answer them on this point. However, Calvinists have not been so careful to note that all of these things are also done by *direct* energy. That is, none of them involve means or instruments. The acquisition of spiritual life is not compared to driving a nail, blowing a trumpet, catching a fish or hunting a rabbit – things which ordinarily entail instruments. Thus, by its use of analogy, the scriptures consistently convey the idea of immediate regeneration.

10) The idea that men are regenerated by means of the scriptural letter implies that absence of the letter is a sure mark of damnation. This is exactly what the Jews thought, and Paul condemned this attitude as putting trust in the letter and not in the Spirit:

Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law... And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? ... But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God. – Rom 2:17-29

This text clearly distinguishes the letter and the Spirit as potentially being two separate things. One can have the letter without having the Spirit, and one can have the Spirit without having the letter. Any other position must take the side of the wicked Jews against the Apostle Paul.

11) All Christians acknowledge that God makes His moral law known to all men without the letter and without a preacher to preach it. It is for this reason that nearly all Christians assert the moral accountability and condemnation of all men, including those who sinned against a Bible they never read. Thus, with remarkable unanimity do all Christians here attest to the power of God to teach men without the means of preachers. If this be the case, then how much more can God make Christ effectually known to the hearts of all elect without such means? If the ministration of death were glorious, how much more shall the ministration of the Spirit be

glorious? (2Cor 3:7-8). To say that none are saved without the letter portrays the Spirit as being less capable than “*the weak and beggarly elements*” of the world (Gal 4:3-9).

12) All Christians acknowledge that Satan has power to corrupt the heart of any man anywhere, and that he can do it without a single sentence of written text or a man to preach it. Is it a plausible claim that God’s plan of overthrowing him entails a system that is strictly strapped to the letter and to human means?

13) The Lord stated a general maxim when He said, “*It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing,*” (Jn 6:63). This was stated to clarify His meaning when He had said earlier, “*Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life...*” (vs 54). This was misunderstood by his hearers as meaning in a literal, natural sense. All things of the flesh, and in the natural realm, are under the curse of sin. To suppose that anything under this curse can be delivered from it by means of anything else under this curse is equivalent to having the blind lead the blind. The wine in the communion cup, though representing things most precious, is itself perishable, as is the bread on the communion platter. Preachers and their preaching, though proclaiming a perfect God, are fraught with potential for error, and this too is a result of sin. These things, being subject to the flesh, are of no profit toward quickening. Deliverance in the natural realm must come from the spiritual realm (Jn 3:6). But those doctrines affirming that spiritual quickening is by natural and human means err by shackling the Holy Spirit to the very realm in which His deliverance is needed. The Lord went on to say, “*the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life,*” by which He did not mean, as some have supposed, that His words, as spoken to the natural ear, effected quickening. Had that been the case, then all around Him would have been quickened. Much less did He mean that men may serve as means of quickening by repeating His words to others. Rather, He was still referring to His earlier remarks about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, and He was explaining that these were things effected in the spirit and by the Spirit in His life-giving work. Now if it were true that natural or human means were used in quickening, then the Lord would have said that the flesh profiteth a part and the Spirit profiteth a part, but instead He affirmed that the flesh profiteth in no part whatsoever.

14) One failing of the Law was its dependence upon human shepherds. These shepherds, upon neglecting and abusing the sheep, were denounced by God, who declared that He would establish a new order of things, saying, “*For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out,*” (Ezek 34:11). His clear meaning was that human shepherds would no longer stand between Him and His sheep, but that he will gather them Himself. Later Christ would declare, “*And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd,*” (John 10:16). The connection between these texts is beyond all reasonable doubt. So there is a crucial sense in which Christ shall gather His sheep without the means of men.

15) The sense in which they shall be gathered directly by Christ Himself is revealed by the word “voice” when He said, “*and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd,*” and as He said elsewhere, “*The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live,*” (Jn 5:25). The sheep are not gathered merely by His word, which another man might restate, but by His “voice,” which no man can

give but Himself. This same “voice” will also raise those who are in the graves (vs 28), but no human instruments will be used in this, so not in the spiritual resurrection either.

16) The scriptures often speak of those who are predisposed to hear the truth, and these are set in contrast to those who are not. It would be absurd to attribute this predisposition as being produced by hearing itself, and no less absurd to say that hearing is somehow instrumental to it. The scriptures make it clear that natural man is always predisposed against hearing. Indeed, they insist he *cannot* hear in a spiritual way. The predisposition to hear must therefore come from the Spirit. There is no reason to suppose that the predisposition is always given simultaneously with hearing, and there is much scriptural evidence it is not. None would insist that the two are necessarily simultaneous unless they had a prior theory to support. So what is the case of the man who is predisposed to hear but has not yet heard? The answer is obvious to any impartial mind: Such a man is born again, and is thereby enabled to see the kingdom of God (Jn 3:3-5).

Jesus habitually stated, “*He that hath ears to hear, let him hear,*” (Mt 11:15, 13:9, 13:43, Rev 2:7, 2:11, 2:17, etc.). This does not refer to natural ears because Jesus insisted elsewhere that some men, though having natural ears, cannot hear:

Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. – John 8:43-44

But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. – John 10:26-27

Paul confirmed:

But the natural man 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 he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. – 1Cor 2:14-15

For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. – Rom 8:5-9

Observe that Jesus did not say, “He that is getting an ear, let him hear.” His plain meaning is that the ear is given prior to hearing. Therefore, when Paul spoke in 1Cor 14:24-25 of an unbeliever hearing the gospel for the first time, he said of him, “*And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.*” This “*secret of the heart*” is the predisposition to hear, produced by the presence of Christ in the heart, placed there by the immediate operation of the Holy Spirit, and because of this secret inward revelation, the unbeliever (in an evangelical sense) recognizes the external revelation as being true, whereupon he believes it.

These facts are set forth in scripture with such undeniable clarity that even some Arminians have been forced to concede them, and they have sought to adapt them to their dubious doctrines by inventing a concept called “prevenient grace,” by which they mean a preliminary state produced by immediate operation of the Spirit whereby a man is enabled to exercise his freewill choice for Christ and be born again. The scriptures will not support such ideas. The same texts that speak of God opening the heart also have Him bringing the heart the full journey to faith. None of them have God merely making faith a possibility. Prevenient grace is therefore a strand of tape. A man is either spiritually dead or spiritually alive, and he cannot be the latter unless he has been spiritually born. But as illogical as prevenient grace may be, it really does no worse than the idea of instrumental regeneration.

These scriptural arguments and others have been offered by Primitive Baptists for over 200 years to show the fallacy of instrumental regeneration, and they have resolutely held that, as Gill speculated, the preached word is actually only the means whereby it “appears” that a man is born again. I shall not undertake to document the fact that this has been the near-unanimous Primitive Baptist position. The literature is so replete with proof that it is unnecessary.

Of course, the Fullerite/Mission controversy did no more to originate the doctrine of immediate regeneration than did the Augustinian/Pelagian controversy originate the doctrines of grace. The effect of both controversies was to resolve ambiguities that were formerly considered inconsequential or had not even captured notice. Yet the doctrine of immediate regeneration had been taught by some, such as Gill and Rushton, who both applied it in some cases, and it was advocated as a rule by others, even before the controversy erupted. This appears to have been the case with John Brine of the English Baptists. Also, Wilson Thompson of the Primitive Baptists, and considered a forefather even by other Baptists, professed to have held this position from his youth (Autobiography, ch 26, p 326), yet this preceded the Fullerite issue. Sylvester Hassell also testified to the antiquity of the doctrine in private correspondence with William Crouse where he said:

So far as I know, the Kuhukee Association never entertained or endorsed the doctrine that God sometimes uses the preached gospel in regenerating sinners... Man, not regenerated by God’s Spirit, may have a natural conviction of sin and conversion (a turning from their outward evil conduct). In my time I never knew one of our ministers or members to believe or maintain that the preaching of man is a *means of regeneration*; nor do I suppose that in 1778 any minister or member of the Kehukee Association held that the Holy Spirit comes through the human preacher to quicken into life a person who is dead in sin. He may regenerate a sinner *while* the minister is preaching, but He does so by *His own direct operation in the sinner’s heart or spirit*. True conviction and conversion are the *effects* of immediate Divine regeneration. – (Regeneration or the New Birth, p 73-74)

Hassell possibly referred to 1778 because it was the first year after the merger of the Regular and Separate Baptists in the Kehukee Association, during which time the Articles of Faith for that association were drawn. Whatever the case, his testimony clearly implies that immediate regeneration was the accepted doctrine in that body well before the Fullerism/Mission controversy had started. If anyone could know the historic position of that association, it would most certainly be Hassell, who served as its preeminent historian.

In the time transpiring since the Fullerism/Mission controversy, Primitive Baptists have been almost unanimous in their support of immediate regeneration, and with rare exceptions, they have enjoyed a state of peace concerning it. Some might question whether instrumental regeneration should now be considered an admissible view given that it was held by some in the Baptist lineage. In my judgment it should not. A distinction must be made between innocent naivete concerning truth and error and willful rejection of truth in favor of error. For example, we readily receive believing children into the church even though they do not understand all particulars of doctrine, but we consider this a very different thing from receiving a deliberate and willful opponent of the truth. Many Christians prior to the Augustinian/Pelagian controversy were innocently naive concerning the doctrinal distinctions that are now called Calvinism and Arminianism, but that dispute presented them with two mutually exclusive views of salvation, and it eliminated the option of naivete for them, and it carried them to a crossroad where perpetuation of their innocence would depend upon a commitment formerly considered to be inconsequential, or perhaps not considered at all. The same situation now exists for the doctrines of immediate and instrumental regeneration. To countenance what is known to be significant error simply because it was admitted in former times is to make tradition the rule of faith, and the same argument, if consistently applied, would open the door for Arminianism and other corruption. Besides, the English Baptists themselves, and all sound Christians prior, upon having their peace disrupted by the agitation of formerly dormant issues, were forced to struggle through those issues, and when they arrived at resolute conclusions concerning them, they thereafter considered those conclusions as essential to soundness. There was no going back for them, and I think not for Primitive Baptists either.

Some Objections Considered

The scriptures that Calvinists most commonly cast against immediate regeneration are:

For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. – 1Cor 4:15

Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. – James 1:18

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. – 1Peter 1:23

These are also the texts with which Gill struggled in his indecision on this subject.

In the case of the first two scriptures, a distinction must be made between causes and confirmations. Regeneration is altogether caused by the direct, inward work of the Holy Spirit, but it is confirmed by conversion to the external word of the gospel. Moreover, this is the only means by which the invisible work of regeneration is conclusively ascertained. When these scriptures speak of men being begotten through the gospel, they are referring to the *appearance* of the matter before human eyes. Paul was not an instrument to their inward regeneration, but to their outward *conversion*. Paul elsewhere told the Galatians, “*My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you,*” (Gal 4:19). The birth considered here is obviously outward conversion because all Calvinists correctly deny that any man can be

regenerated twice. Yet the birth in Gal 4:19 is almost surely the same as in the texts above. So use of the former texts against immediate regeneration is shown to be in error. In all places, the birth under consideration is in the sense of outward conversion, not of regeneration.

This distinction between appearance and reality can also be seen in: *“Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him,”* (Heb 5:8-9). As the omniscient God, Jesus Christ had nothing to learn and was already perfect, yet his condescension and suffering perfected Him in the eyes of men, whose confidence in Him was strengthened by the fact that He actually experienced the same trials they themselves endure. Christ was perfected in our perception, though in reality He was already such.

As for 1Pet 1:23, this text refers to the Living Word, or Son of God, and not merely to written or preached descriptions of Him. Context will adequately show this to be true.

As for other texts referring to salvation by means of preaching (e.g. Rom 1:16, 2Thes 2:13,14), it must be understood that “salvation” is a broad expression in the Bible referring to various combinations of the concepts of regeneration, justification, conversion, sanctification, assurance, resurrection and glorification, and that it can refer to some of these without referring to others; therefore, it does not always include the idea of regeneration. There is no denial that the gospel serves as a powerful means to important aspects of salvation; however, it is not a means to the specific step of regeneration.

JUSTIFICATION

Among Baptists adhering to the doctrines of grace, there have been two major views on the doctrine of justification. The primary difference in these views concerns the role of faith. The first position claims that man is justified by faith in Jesus Christ in the sense that faith *certifies* his righteous standing before God. This position denies that faith is in any sense a *cause* or *means* to this righteousness; rather, it says righteousness was fully and finally acquired for all elect at Calvary. I will call this the *evidentiary* position as this describes the asserted role of faith. The other view agrees that faith serves to confirm a righteous standing, but adds that it also serves as an *instrument* or *means* of applying the righteousness of Christ to the sinner. This view contends that God still counts a man as condemned until he is brought to faith. I will call this the *instrumental* view. This view has greater acceptance among Calvinists, partly because it was endorsed in the famous Westminster Confession of Faith. Notwithstanding, the purpose of this chapter is to show that the evidentiary position was common among early Baptists, and that it is in greater accord with the Bible.

Early Baptist Views

Many Baptists would probably be surprised to know the popularity of the evidentiary view in their past. The 1689 London Confession of Faith is commonly assumed to be an near-infallible representation of early Baptist beliefs. This confession is usually interpreted as advocating the instrumental view of justification. Baptists who are a bit more knowledgeable in history will also be aware of John Gill (1697-1771) – an English Baptist commentator. Gill was once held in high esteem by Baptists in both England and America, but was gradually relegated to the closet when Baptists drifted in the direction of Arminianism. Now Gill very clearly taught the evidentiary position. Most assume that he was anomalous in this and that the London Confession is more indicative of what Baptists then believed. I think more careful research will show that Gill was representative of many, both before him and after. This appears to be an important point in which many historical Baptists differed from most Protestants.

The London Confession of 1646 was one of the earliest confessions of English Baptists, and is thought by some to be one of the purest representations of their beliefs. The 28th article of the Confession stated:

Those that have union with Christ, are justified from all their sins by the blood of Christ, which justification is a gracious and full acquittance of a guilty sinner from all sin, by God, through the satisfaction that Christ hath made by His death for all their sins, and this applied (in manifestation of it) through faith.

The words “in manifestation of it” powerfully suggest a variation of the evidentiary view. The same conclusion could be drawn from the Midland Confession of 1655, which stated in its 10th article:

That every man is justified by Christ – Romans; viii.33; I Cor. vi.11; apprehended by faith; and that no man is justified in the sight of God partly by Christ and partly by works. Romans iii.20,28,30; Gal. v.4.

Observe that faith is placed after justification, and the role of faith is to “apprehend” justification. Apprehend means “to seize,” and it frequently means “to seize with the mind” or “to comprehend” or “to perceive,” and this is the probable meaning here. Had they intended to convey the idea of instrumental justification, words like “applied” or “appropriated” would have served much better.

The individual writings of Baptists from those times will confirm these interpretations of their confessions. First consider the detailed explanation of Edward Drapes in 1648:

The Scriptures, say we, are justified by faith, how then say you it is by the blood of Christ, Rom. 5:1?

In answer to this, there are two things to be minded:

1. That when men sinned, there was something threatened (viz.) eternal wrath and misery, which was not then inflicted.
2. Man’s conscience became guilty, and so wrath, fear, terror and torment seized on him. Now we must consider that the blood of Christ frees us from both of these: from the first, while we in our own minds, through wicked works, were enemies; from the second, Viz. that guilt we had contracted through sin, the blood of Christ saves us through faith; therefore, it is truly said, being justified by faith we have peace with God. Faith receives what Christ hath done for us, and so justifies us in our consciences, that we have no more conscience of sin, that is to say, guilt for sin, which will appear more plainly by this similitude: A man hath committed an offense against the law, suppose felony or treason. Now the law saith, He that so offendeth shall die the death. The conscience of his fault presently strikes horror to his spirit. The man is apprehended and imprisoned for it and shut up till the dismal day of execution. Now while the poor man can expect nothing but death, some friend of his, unknown to him, sues for his pardon, satisfies the law and obtains it, by which his friend hath made sure of his life. Now is the man truly justified or acquitted from his fault though he knows it not. Well, what then? His friend comes to him and saith, Be of good cheer, thy offense is forgiven thee and so gives him his pardon which he gladly accepts, and, having received it, he is now delivered from his bondage, the prison opened and the jailer commanded to set him at liberty and he is as surely freed from the offense as if he had not sinned at all. Even so it is with a poor soul, for when man sinned, wrath, even eternal misery was threatened and his spirit filled with horror. Now the Lord Christ, when the soul was a stranger to him, obtained his pardon, purchased it with His own blood, and then the man’s eternal happiness was made sure of, and when the Lord Christ tells him what he hath done for him, saying to him, thy sins are pardoned my son, fear not, then the wrath, horror, guilt and terror fly away, and the man is by faith, that is to say, by believing what Christ hath done, at peace in his soul.

Faith, I say, is not the man’s justification or righteousness, but receives it, for it is a free gift of God. – (“Gospel Glory Proclaimed Before the Sons of Men in the Visible and Invisible Worship of God,” Ch 12, 1648)

Another English Baptist named Samuel Richardson wrote a detailed treatise on justification in 1647. Richardson was a signer of the 1646 Confession. He summarized his views on faith with:

That faith or any thing in us is not a *cause*, *means*, or *condition*, required to partake of the Covenant of Grace, justification or salvation, but only *fruits* and *effects* of the Covenant. – (“Justification by Christ Alone,” 1647)

In that same treatise, William Kiffen, a signer of both the 1646 and 1689 Confessions, endorsed the work with these comments:

That the Scripture holds forth justification by faith in a sense *is very clear*, but yet under no other consideration, *but by way of evidence*, Heb. 11:1,2. As it respects the taking away of sin from off the Conscience: For indeed the debt is paid by the blood of Christ alone, and we are therefore said to be justified by His blood, Rom. 5:9. For indeed, as Christ Jesus our Lord has paid the debt, “*The Lord having laid upon him the iniquities of us all*,” so does He declare this satisfaction and acceptation of us in Christ by faith. Faith is the eye of the understanding whereby the soul comes to see the great things which God the Father has prepared for them who love Him.

Richardson considered the common accusation that “this doctrine opens a gap to licentious liberty.” His reply was as amusing as it was profound: “...none shall stumble and hurt themselves by this truth, but such as shall perish, and it’s no matter for them. The children must have bread though dogs may snatch it.” To this he added, “...the Apostle says, ‘*If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ*,’ (1Jn 2:1). May not men cavil as well at this, and take encouragement to sin?” Ministers should remember that God did not call them to be psychologists but to preach His word. If it is the truth, then the psychological implications will take care of themselves regardless of our speculations about what those implications might be. Hence, no doctrine should be assessed merely on the basis of our speculations about how men will react to it. The doctrines of predestination and preservation have long been impugned by many who presumed to know more about human psychology than God Himself, yet the facts of experience show these doctrines do not have the accused effects, nor do rival doctrines do anything to avert the accused effects.

The same views on justification were advocated by prominent Baptists even after the 1689 Confession. This can be seen in the lengthy treatise entitled “A Defense of the Doctrine of Eternal Justification,” written by John Brine in 1732. And, as stated before, it was clearly the position of Gill (1697-1771), as may be seen in the following quotes from Body of Divinity:

Justification is an act of God’s grace, flowing from his sovereign good will and pleasure; the elect of God are said to be *justified by his grace*; and as if that expression was not strong enough to set forth the freeness of it, the word *freely* is added elsewhere; *Being justified freely by his grace* (Titus 3:7; Rom. 3:24). Justification is by many divines distinguished into active and passive. Active justification is the act of God; it is God that justifies. Passive justification is the act of God, terminating on the conscience of a believer, commonly called a transient act, passing upon an external object. It is not of this I shall now treat, but of the former; which is an act internal and eternal, taken up in the divine mind from eternity, and is an immanent, abiding one in it; it is, as Dr. Ames expresses it, “a sentence conceived in the divine mind, by the decree of justifying.”

Now, as before observed, as God’s will to elect, is the election of his people, so his will to justify them, is the justification of them; as it is an immanent act in God, it is an act of his grace towards them, is wholly without them, entirely resides in the divine mind, and lies in his estimating, accounting, and constituting them righteous, through the righteousness of his Son; and, as such, did not first commence in time, but from eternity...

Faith is not the cause, but an effect of justification; it is not the cause of it in any sense; it is not the moving cause, that is the free grace of God; *Being justified freely by his grace*, (Rom. 3:24)

nor the efficient cause of it; *It is God that justifies*, (Rom. 8:33) nor the meritorious cause, as some express it; or the matter of it, that is the obedience and blood of Christ, (Rom. 5:9,19) or the righteousness of Christ, consisting of his active and passive obedience; nor even the instrumental cause; for, as Mr. Baxter himself argues, “If faith is the instrument of our justification, it is the instrument either of God or man; not of man, for justification is God’s act; he is the sole Justifier, (Rom. 3:26) man doth not justify himself: nor of God, for it is not God that believes”: nor is it a *causa sine qua non*, as the case of elect infants shows; it is not in any class of causes whatever; but it is the effect of justification: all men have not faith, and the reason why some do not believe is, because they are none of Christ’s sheep; they were not chosen in him, nor justified through him; but justly left in their sins, and so to condemnation; the reason why others believe is, because they are ordained to eternal life, have a justifying righteousness provided for them, and are justified by it, and shall never enter into condemnation: the reason why any are justified, is not because they have faith; but the reason why they have faith, is because they are justified; was there no such blessing of grace as justification of life in Christ, for the sons of men, there would be no such thing as faith in Christ bestowed on them; precious faith is obtained through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ, (2 Peter 1:1) nor, indeed, would there be any room for it, nor any use of it, if a justifying righteousness was not previously provided. Agreeable to this are the reasonings and assertions of Twisse, Maccovius, and others. Now if faith is not the cause, but the effect of justification; then as every cause is before its effect, and every effect follows its cause, justification must be before faith, and faith must follow justification.

Faith is the evidence and manifestation of justification, and therefore justification must be before it; *Faith is the evidence of things not seen*, (Heb. 11:1) but it is not the evidence of that which as yet is not; what it is an evidence of, must be, and it must exist before it... – (2.5, p 203-204)

Gill, Brine and others of their times contended for what has been called “eternal justification.” The propriety of such terminology I will consider later. The important point for now is that the various quotes above indicate that justification was a carefully considered subject among the early Baptists and that the evidentiary position was a common view. This stands in contrast to articles two and four in the chapter on justification in the 1689 Confession. These articles clearly conveyed the idea of instrumental justification:

11.2 Faith thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet it is not alone in the person justified, but ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love.

11.4 God did from all eternity decree to justify all the elect, and Christ did in the fullness of time die for their sins, and rise again for their justification; nevertheless, they are not justified personally, until the Holy Spirit doth in time due actually apply Christ unto them.

The explanation for this difference from the 1646 Confession and the writers just quoted is possibly to be found in the origin of the 1689 Confession. This document is actually a modified form of the Westminster Confession. The Westminster was drawn by an assembly summoned by British Parliament. Several denominations were represented in the assembly, but the great majority were Presbyterians. None were Baptists. The document has ever since been considered a Presbyterian confession. In those days the Church of England asserted its political powers against other denominations in that country. The Presbyterians were a formidable body also, and had sufficient power to offer resistance to this persecution. Baptists and Congregationalists are

alleged to have sought refuge by presenting an appearance of alignment with the Presbyterians, which they did by adopting as their own confessions modified versions of the Westminster.

These circumstances have caused the 1689 Confession to be viewed with skepticism by some Baptists, who question whether it is completely representative of early Baptist beliefs. Some have even contemptuously called it a “dipped” paedobaptist confession, with “dipped” referring to the fact that a substitution of immersion for sprinkling was one of the primary modifications that Baptists made to the original document. These same skeptics place more confidence in the 1646 Confession, which they say is a purely Baptist document and void of Protestant influence. This skepticism concerning the later confession is oftentimes carried to unreasonable extremes. It is on balance an outstanding document and worthy of respect. But there is reasonable evidence that the earlier confession intended a different view on justification, or one could at least say it intended a different emphasis. It is also to be considered that Baptists were a rapidly growing body at this time with large numbers coming from other orders, so that, on a point of doctrinal detail, what was a majority view in 1646 may not have been in 1689.

The following quote from Charles Spurgeon (1834-92), the most famous of the English Baptists, shows a strong tendency toward the eternal view of justification held by Gill, but expresses qualifications that would also honor the wording of the 1689 Confession:

So with regard to justification, I must hold, that in the moment when Jesus Christ paid my debts, my debts were cancelled – in the hour when he worked out for me a perfect righteousness it was imputed to me, and therefore I may as a believer say I was complete in Christ before I was born, accepted in Jesus, even as Levi was blessed in the loins of Abraham by Melchisedec; but I know likewise that justification is described in the Scriptures as passing upon me at the time I believe. “Being justified by faith,” I am told “I have peace with God, through Jesus Christ.” I think, therefore that adoption and justification, while they have a very great alliance with eternity, and were virtually done then, yet have both of them such a near relation to us in time, and such a bearing upon our own personal standing and character that they have also a part and parcel of themselves actually carried out and performed in time in the heart of every believer. I may be wrong in this exposition; it requires much more time to study this subject than I have been able yet to give to it, seeing that my years are not yet many; I shall no doubt by degrees come to the knowledge more fully of such high and mysterious points of gospel doctrine. But nevertheless, while I find the majority of sound divines holding that the works of justification and adoption are due in our lives I see, on the other hand, in Scripture much to lead me to believe that both of them were done in eternity; and I think the fairest view of the case is, that while they were virtually done in eternity, yet both adoption and justification are actually passed upon us, in our proper persons, consciences, and experiences, in time – so that both the Westminster confession and the idea of Dr. Gill can be proved to be Scriptural, and we may hold them both without any prejudice the one to the other. – Spurgeon's Sermons, "Adoption", Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Vol. 7

Likely both sides of the argument will find support for themselves in this quote, but it definitely shows that Spurgeon had far greater respect for the position of Gill than those modern Baptists who contemptuously denounce him with such terms as “hypercalvinist” and “antinomian.” Indeed, Spurgeon’s respect for the instrumental position he attributed to the number of divines who held it, but his respect for Gill’s position he attributed to the teachings of *scripture*. Now the real issue for our present purpose is whether faith is instrumental in making one righteous before God. With respect to this, Spurgeon said, “So with regard to justification, I must hold,

that in the moment when Jesus Christ paid my debts, my debts were cancelled – in the hour when he worked out for me a perfect righteousness it was imputed to me, and therefore I may as a believer say I was complete in Christ before I was born...” This statement clearly makes the crucifixion alone to be the point in logic where the elect were made righteous before God. When Spurgeon says, “I was complete in Christ before I was born,” he obviously meant in a legal sense, which is exactly what the evidentiary position contends. Later when Spurgeon qualified by saying that justification was “actually passed upon us” in time, the only way to reconcile this with his earlier statement is to understand that by “justification” he meant *declared* and *certified* as righteous, which is exactly how the evidentiary position interprets the word. So when all parts of this statement are carefully weighed, it says much to endorse the evidentiary view.

This view can be found among early American Baptists as well. This can be seen in a Circular Letter of the Philadelphia Association entitled “Justification,” published in 1785, authored by William Rogers:

Our justification is by some ascribed to faith as an instrumental cause. Strictly speaking, we apprehend faith as no cause at all in this momentous procedure, but rather an effect. It is true, the scriptures frequently mention a justification by faith. By such expressions it is evident the object, and not the act, of faith is designed; the object of faith is Christ and his righteousness; this the believing soul lays fast hold on. Faith is the eye which discovers, the hand which receives... It is beautifully noticed by one of our very first and most orthodox writers. “The reason why any are justified is not because they have faith; but the reason why they have faith is because they are justified.”

The American Primitive Baptists have almost unanimously carried this view forward to the present. The following list of references is from their respected historical figures:

- 1) Wilson Thompson, Triumphs of Truth, 1825.
- 2) Samuel Trott, “My Thoughts on Justification,” Signs of the Times, vol 5. 1837.
- 3) Gilbert Beebe, “Ephesians 2:8,” Signs of the Times, Oct 15, 1867.
- 4) James Oliphant, Justification and Kindred Subjects, 1899.
- 5) Sylvester Hassell, “Articles of Faith,” The Gospel Messenger, Jan 1901.

One point where these Baptists might appear to differ is that some claimed justification to have occurred in eternity whereas others claimed it occurred at the crucifixion or resurrection of Christ. Some of the English Baptists were disposed to claim the former. Primitive Baptists have been more apt to claim the latter. In the 1837 article by Samuel Trott listed above, he wrote in defense of the idea that justification occurred at the resurrection. The following statement from this article is particularly interesting:

...I thus choose to make myself singular in departing from the beaten trail of our Old School brethren on this point. And I freely admit that my brethren have on their side all the true advocates for the doctrine of Sovereign grace who have published anything on this subject, perhaps for the last hundred years; that is, so far as I have been acquainted with their writings. – (Signs., “My Thoughts on Justification,” vol 5, 1837)

The real importance of this quote is that it suggests the popularity of the evidentiary view among early Baptists. Trott, who was well-acquainted with Baptist literature, claimed that virtually

everything published by “Old School” Baptists on this subject for 100 years was in essential agreement with the position that had been defended by Gill, Brine, etc. Trott wrote nothing to correct their views as to the role of faith. He only complained of their assertion that justification occurred in eternity.

The differences between these Baptists were smaller than initially appear, and derived largely from imprecise terminology. All agreed that the death of Christ was the point in logic where the elect were rendered righteous before God. All agreed that, chronologically, Old Testament saints were accounted righteous before the crucifixion occurred, and that this was done upon the predetermination of God to bring the latter event to pass. When the English Baptists asserted that justification occurred in eternity, they were right in their thinking but potentially misleading in their terminology. Their thinking was that justification is ultimately based in the state of God’s mind toward the elect, and that because He is an immutable God, His view of the elect must have always been the same – not at all points of logic but at all points of time.

This thinking is irrefutable, though some have presumed to overthrow it, saying, for example, that since God’s plan to create does not imply creation, neither does His plan to justify imply justification. While this complaint has a valid point, it is not a point that would refute what the English Baptists intended. A distinction must be made between an action of God and the state of His mind. God might *plan* an action or change of action, such as the introduction of a Universe or the regeneration of a man, but it is logically impossible to *plan* a change of mind. There is no sense in saying that God planned to view the elect as unrighteous over some span of time, but simultaneously planned to change His mind and view them differently thereafter. He indeed viewed His elect as righteous in Christ from eternity, and with no other position will one make sense of the fact that God was glorifying His deceased elect long before Christ died and before there was a gospel to preach.

When a change of mind is based on an action, the change does not occur with execution of the action but at the point the action became *planned*. Consider a man whose mind is perplexed with a problematic state he must correct the following day. As he contemplates the problem the night before, he suddenly sees an action leading to a sure solution. At this point, a distinction must be made between the circumstance that produced the problem and the problem itself. The circumstance will be resolved by execution of the plan on the following day, but the problem itself, as a state of his mind, is instantly resolved and settled simply by the fact that now there is a plan. If by “justification” we are referring to the state of God’s mind toward the elect, then all problems were settled in eternity with the completion of His plan, even though the actual execution of the plan would occur in time. If the sacrifice of Christ is truly the sole basis of our righteous state, then the mind of God toward the elect became settled at the point in logic where this sacrifice was planned. To say otherwise is either to affirm that God was not truly resolved within Himself that the sacrifice would be sufficient, or to affirm that God was unsure of His ability to bring this sufficient condition to pass.

However, the complaint against the eternal justification position has merit inasmuch as God’s *justification* of the elect and His *view* of them are not exactly the same thing. Strictly speaking, justification is an official *declaration of righteousness*. It is an *expression* of divine opinion, not the divine opinion itself. When discussing this subject, it is important that such delineations be

made. In particular, distinctions must be made between: 1) *viewing* someone as righteous, 2) *declaring* them as righteous, 3) *setting the basis* for their righteousness, and 4) *applying* righteousness to them. All these Baptists agreed there is no *application* of righteousness in faith, so they disclaimed the instrumental view. They also agreed that the *basis* for righteousness is in the sacrifice of Christ alone. Differences between them were largely based in the distinction between “viewing” one as righteous versus “declaring” them as such. They also had the common habit of sometimes using “justification” in the sense of *making* righteous. Such is no great error as this is also a secondary definition of the word in the Bible, but it will lead to confusion without being accompanied with adequate clarification.

To illustrate these ideas, consider an audience in a courtroom along with an accused man. These anxiously await as the judge ponders the presented evidence of the case in his chambers. Upon contemplating this evidence, the judge concludes that it is impossible for the man to be guilty of the accusation against him. Suppose the judge, upon arriving at this conclusion, were to consider his work done, and were to indifferently depart for home through the backdoor of the courthouse, spending the balance of the day fishing. The courtroom and the accused man would be left in suspense. The man has not been *justified* in the sense of being *declared* righteous. The good judge will not be so negligent. As he enters the courtroom with verdict in hand, he glances at the accused man and *views* him as innocent. But the anxiety of the accused man is such that he is now trembling, and the courtroom is anxious with him. The man has not been formally acquitted, and to everyone except the judge, the moment of truth still awaits.

In like manner, the Old Testament saints were *viewed* as righteous by the Supreme Judge because their verdict was in His hand. It was upon this basis that their names were written “*in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,*” (Rev 13:8). But the formal declaration of their acquittal had not yet been made. Their Defense Counsel, the Son of God, had assured them through His word that righteousness would be given them, and that it would be sufficient for their acquittal, but still, the verdict had not been declared. Then when Jesus Christ had been crucified for their offenses, and His body was in the grave, all the facts relevant to the case had been established, or we could say the *basis* for their acquittal had been fully set, but still, the verdict had not been *declared*. As with the anxious courtroom described above, men, angels and even devils still awaited the Moment of Truth in which the Supreme Judge of the Universe would *declare* the momentous Verdict, yet that Verdict had been in His hand from eternity. The Verdict was most powerfully *declared* when He quickened the body of the Lord Jesus Christ and raised Him from the dead. The resurrection was the verdict. It was not part of the facts that had been considered when arriving at this verdict. It was the verdict itself. Jesus was “*delivered for our offences,*” and with this event, all facts of the case were set in place. He was then “*raised for our justification*” (Rom 4:25) in the sense that this event *declared* our acquittal. Yet this was a declaration pertaining to the elect family of God *en masse*. It was also needful that there be declarations at the individual or personal level, which of course brings us to the issue of justification by faith.

A Scriptural Defense of the Evidentiary View

Before presenting our defense, there are a couple of points of agreement between these views that are needful for an understanding of this doctrine:

First, when an individual is rendered righteous before God through the blood of Christ, this is not a change *to* or *in* the individual but is a change *for* the individual. It is something done in his behalf. Consequently, justification is not to be confused with regeneration. While advocates of the instrumental view may have regeneration and justification occurring at the same point in time, even they acknowledge that the concepts are very different. To illustrate the difference, consider a hardened criminal who has been convicted and is now in prison awaiting execution. Suppose this man represents a formidable threat to society. Before he could be justly and conscionably set free, two things must be done: First, the demands of the law against him must be removed. Second, his hardened nature must be changed such that he no longer poses a threat to his fellow man. In the first of these steps, the man is rendered righteous before the eyes of the law much like the elect are rendered righteous before God through the blood of Christ. The second step, or the changing of his nature, is analogous to regeneration. A failure to recognize the distinction between these two steps has contributed toward the common but erroneous idea that men are born again by the act of believing. While the scriptures repeatedly state that men are justified by faith, never do they teach that men are regenerated by faith. Faith is the consequence, not the cause, of being born again.

Second, both views understand that Old Testament saints were accounted righteous by God notwithstanding the fact they lived prior to the crucifixion. There is nothing mysterious in this. The same type thing is common in society. Two men may be equally indebted to the bank yet be viewed in an entirely different light. Suppose satisfaction for the debts of the first man are foreseeable. He will be viewed by the bank and the community as an honest and trustworthy man. But suppose no satisfaction is foreseeable for the debts of the second. Because default appears certain for him, all will view him either as dishonest or unworthy of credit. The Lord accounted Old Testament saints as righteous because satisfaction for their debts was in view.

These two positions also concur on many other important things, including all points of the doctrines of grace. However, their difference on the point of justification is sufficient to warrant our careful investigation of scripture. My belief is that such investigation will show the evidentiary position to be superior, and for the following reasons:

1) The instrumental position is uncomfortably vague, and tends to morph into the evidentiary position when forced to explicate itself. When the instrumental position says that an elect is accounted condemned until brought to faith, the practical implications of being in such a state are very unclear. The man was elected and predestined to salvation from eternity; Christ died for his sins on the cross, and he is also supposedly predestined to be accounted righteous at some future point in time, but is for the present accounted by God as condemned. How does this effect God's posture toward him? Does this mean that if the man were to die in this state he would be eternally damned? The advocates of this position resolutely affirm that he could not die at this point since this would be in violation of divine predestination. This explanation is therefore based on strictly hypothetical notions, and as such, could be credibly charged as meddling with

foolish and unlearned questions. So does it mean that God, for the time being, must altogether treat him as a non-elect, turning a blind eye to the fact that he will one day be a regenerate man? If this be the claim then it is surely wrong. Paul had no faith until Damascus road, yet he had been separated by God from his mother's womb for the purpose of preaching the gospel (Gal 1:15). There is no doubt also that divine providence was over his unregenerate life giving him education and experience to prepare him for his ultimate purpose. It is important to understand that at no point in our experience does God change toward us; rather, God changes us toward Him. So, still seeking for an answer, does it mean that God will deny him faith? The instrumental position cannot offer this answer as it would produce a stalemate. Will he be denied the Holy Spirit? This answer also produces a stalemate inasmuch as it denies the prerequisite to faith. A man does not believe in order to be occupied by the Holy Spirit; rather, he is occupied by the Holy Spirit in order to believe. So what is the practical consequence of him being accounted condemned until the point of faith? It appears that no reasonable answer can be given to this question except to say that he will be denied the visible certification of the righteousness Christ has bought for him. Now the problem is that when the instrumental view offers this answer it will have effectively morphed into the evidentiary position.

The position is also vague in its very use of the term "instrument." Instruments are of course preceded by some necessity that the instrument is thereafter designed to accommodate. When a man builds a house, he will first perceive a need to drive nails, which will motivate him to invent or acquire an instrument, the hammer. He will also see a need to lay mortar, which will move him to invent or acquire a trowel. In both cases, the necessity demanding the instrument is seen first, and is at least as obvious as the instrument itself. Now if faith is an instrument in the building of a righteous man, we should have been carried to this conclusion by some obvious necessity that faith could serve to meet. This was not the case. Rather, it seems that faith was simply seen as playing some highly significant role, but because it was unacceptable to call it a "cause" or "basis," it got classified as an instrument by default. It is neither a cause nor a basis nor an instrument. It is a certificate.

2) The primary meaning of the term "justify" is to *declare* righteous, not to *make* righteous. Thus, in the primary sense, the act of justifying does not change the thing being justified, but declares it to be what it already is. This can be seen in numerous scriptural examples, including:

He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD. – Prov 17:15

This text presents "justifieth" and "condemneth" asonyms. To condemn a man is not to make him guilty but to *declare* him such. The word "justify" must have a similar meaning or else the symmetry of the text is destroyed. A second example is in:

The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children. – Mt 11:19

Wisdom is not made any wiser by the fact that people acknowledge it to be such, but reasonable people *declare* it to be what it truly is. As another example:

And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. – Lk 7:29

Obviously, people can only acknowledge and declare the wisdom and righteousness of God. They surely cannot aid it or hinder it. As a fourth example:

For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. – Rom 2:13-14

A man that has done the law is already righteous and is in no need of being made such. His state can only be declared. Add a fifth example with:

For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged. – Rom 3:3-4

Men can neither help nor hinder the truth of God's word, but God can be "justified" by them in the proper sense of the term. Now our sixth example should powerfully make the point:

Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. – Rom 4:23-25

Every Christian understands that it was the death of Christ that put away our sins and *made* us righteous, but this text says it was His resurrection that *justified*. The meaning is that His death established the fact, and His resurrection then *declared* it. This is the case of justification at the corporate level, embracing the entire elect family of God *en masse*. Justification by faith occurs at a personal level, but at either level, the term "justify" conveys the same idea, i.e. to *declare* a righteous state. Other scriptures illustrating this meaning are: Mt 12:35-37, Lk 7:35, 1Cor 4:4, 1Tim 3:16, and Jas 2:21-25.

The fourth, fifth and sixth examples are especially important because they come from the writings of Paul, which are of course the very epicenter of this momentous subject. These examples also present some of his earliest usages of the term. So, following the rule that nothing defines scriptural terms better than scriptures themselves, one should depart from this implied definition only when hard-pressed to do so. To the contrary, one will be hard-pressed to leave it.

3) When the instrumental position stresses terms like "instrument" or "means" to describe the role of faith, the intent is to avert the idea that faith is somehow supplemental to the obedience and death of Christ as the basis of our righteousness. All parties agree this error would be egregious. But given that the point is crucial, why does the Bible never qualify itself with these terms when speaking of the role of faith? The Bible never says we are justified *by means of* faith. It simply says we are justified by faith. The point is that the instrumental position offers an explanation *of* scripture that is actually nowhere found *in* scripture, even though we have compelling reasons to expect it there. Now any reasonable mind should suspect that qualifications were omitted because no purpose would be served by them under the intended definition of "justify." Accordingly, these qualifications are also needless under the evidentiary

position, because in choosing the primary definition of the term, it has averted the errant ideas to which the instrumental position is vulnerable. The evidentiary position is like the Bible in that it can say without qualification that a man is justified by faith outright, but in the sense in which an accused man is justified by the evidence favoring his case. This evidence does not contribute to the innocence it declares; rather, it is a consequence of that innocence. Accordingly, the evidentiary position claims that faith does not contribute toward a righteous state before God, but is a consequence of it.

4) The evidentiary position is logically superior in that it places the expected ordering on legal acts of God done *for* the elect with efficient acts of God done *to* the elect. The instrumental position reverses this ordering from what should be expected. Almost any transaction requiring legal action has such work being done before the transaction is executed. When a child is adopted, the legal work is done first then the child is transferred to the new parents. When two companies merge, the legal work is done before the merger is performed. When a house is purchased, legal conditions are met before the house is occupied. When Boaz took Ruth to be his wife, the necessary legal requirements were first met. When Abraham purchased the cave at Machpelah for the burial of Sarah, he first made legal arrangements with the sons of Heth. Numerous other examples could be given. But according to the instrumental view, God spiritually quickens dead alien sinners, liberates them from sin, and places His Holy Spirit within them before the legal work has been done.

All acknowledge that God must consider a man righteous in Christ before resurrecting and glorifying his body. But if a righteous state before God is necessary for this, one should expect it to be necessary for regeneration as well. Regeneration does to the inward man what resurrection does to the outward man. If the legal provisions in the blood of Christ are necessary for one, they should also be necessary for the other. A man is not glorified to absolve his sins; rather, his sins must be absolved if he is to be glorified. The same order should be expected in regeneration. But if sin is put away prior to regeneration, faith cannot be a means of putting it away, or at least not when faith is correctly considered to be the effect, and not the cause, of being born again.

Add to this the fact that regeneration is a liberating act. It liberates from the bondage of carnality and sin (Jn 3:3-5, Rom 8:2, 8:15, 1Cor 1:12, 2Cor 3:17, Col 1:12-13, 2Pet 2:19); but, criminals are not liberated to satisfy the demands of the law. Rather they are liberated because the demands of the law have been satisfied. Hence, a righteous state before God should logically precede regeneration, and should logically precede faith.

When the scriptures speak of the effects of regeneration, they do not include the idea of being made righteous before God. Men are born again to believe (Jn 1:11-13), to know the things freely given them (1Cor 2:12), to see the kingdom of God (Jn 3:3-5), to see the light of the glory of the knowledge of God (2Cor 4:6), to live (Jn 5:24), to never perish (Jn 10:28), to deliver them from their wicked natures (Eph 2:1-3), to deliver from death in sin (Col 2:13), to be translated into His kingdom (Col 1:13), etc, but they are not regenerated to be rendered righteous before God. Rather, these texts are either consistent with the idea that man is rendered righteous prior to quickening, or else the texts go beyond this by actually implying such. For example:

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross. – Col 2:13-14

Hence, forgiveness of sins was a completed act as of the time of quickening, and the condemnation of the law was already done away as well, having been removed by the death of Christ on the cross. The same pattern is seen in:

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. – Ezek 36:25-27

So this text has cleansing occurring prior to regeneration, as would be expected under the evidentiary position. The same order is seen in 1Cor 6:11. While the scriptures elsewhere speak of the “*washing of regeneration*” (Tit 3:5), as though regeneration itself is a means of cleansing, this should be understood of the cleansing of the nature or of the *manifestation* of being washed in the blood of Christ. Whatever the case, if there is any sense in which God’s children are cleansed prior to regeneration, logic precludes all possibilities except that of *legal* cleansing in the sight of God.

5) The evidentiary position receives abundant support from scripture in its claim that all the elect of God were forever made righteous the moment Jesus died. His death alone met every legal condition to remove their sins and to open the way for their transformation to the image of God. This includes their regeneration and the faith it enables, by which faith they are personally declared righteous or “justified.”

The scriptures consistently present the reconciliation of God toward His people as being a completed action as of the death of Christ. Since it is impossible to conceive of God being reconciled to those who are yet counted as sinners, it follows that if reconciliation were secured by the death of Christ alone, then a righteous state before God must have been secured by the same. Consider:

For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. – Rom 5:10

Therefore, we were not merely rendered *reconcilable* to God by the death of Christ, but were actually *reconciled* by it, and this was done when we were contemplated as *enemies*, which could not be said of a believer. Further:

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. – 2Cor 5:18-20

This text states that God became reconciled to His people by the death of Christ alone, and that having become reconciled, He committed men with the word of the gospel for the purpose of securing reconciliation – not in His own mind towards men, but – in the minds of men toward Him. The mind, purpose and posture of God toward the elect was forever settled in Jesus Christ. The only remaining business is to correct and settle the minds of men.

The same pattern can be observed in:

For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. – Eph 2:14-17

Thus, it follows once again that the preaching of the gospel supposes a completed reconciliation and is not the means of securing it. This is restated in:

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross. – Col 2:13-15

The sinner is quickened and brought to faith because he is *already* forgiven, not that he might be forgiven. His sins were long ago nailed to the cross of Calvary. Add to this:

By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. – Heb 10:10

For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. – Heb 10:14

His death on the cross set them apart by perfecting them. This means that all legal claims against them were satisfied. At Calvary, all the legal business of salvation was done for the entire elect family together and at once.

The instrumental position will commonly reply to the scriptures offered above with an argument based on Rom 8:30 where all the elect of God are described in present tense as being “glorified.” The meaning there is that their glorification, while not yet realized, has been rendered absolutely certain. The argument says the above texts should be construed the same. That is, the forgiveness, reconciliation, etc. of which they speak did not actually occur at the cross but were only rendered certain by the cross. This argument fails to consider that the glorification of man is a change produced by an *act* of God whereas forgiveness, reconciliation, etc. are changes in the *mind* of God. The first type of change may be chronological. The second can only be logical. The future glorification of man may be planned and rendered certain. A future change in the mind of God is impossible. So we need not doubt that these texts indeed teach that the cross was the point in logic where the sins of the elect were put away in the mind of God.

6) The scriptures teach that faith is itself a benefit of being in Christ, but it cannot be both this and the means of applying Christ to the individual. It cannot be both a unique benefit of being in

Christ and a means of placing one in Christ. It is *in Christ* that God “*hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places,*” (Eph 1:3). These blessings surely include faith. These blessings were not given to put us in Christ, but because we *already* were in Christ. It is *by Christ* that we “*believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory,*” (1Pet 1:21). It is given us “*in behalf of Jesus Christ*” to believe on His name and to suffer for His sake (Phil 1:29). These things were not given to place us in Christ or apply Christ to us personally, but because we were *already* accounted in Him. When Paul claimed our salvation and faith are not of ourselves but are the gift of God (Eph 2:8-10), the apostle then explained that we are His workmanship created *in Christ Jesus*. Again, faith does not place us in Christ; rather, it is a consequence and benefit of being in Christ. Peter confirmed this by saying, “*Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ,*” (2Pet 1:1). Hence, faith is a benefit of the righteousness of Christ, not a means to attaining it. The instrumental position places Christ in one hand and the Divine purpose to grant faith in the other. It claims the hands are joined at regeneration when faith is given. However, the scriptures teach that these things belong in the same hand.

7) The instrumental view of justification fits awkwardly with the doctrine of immediate regeneration. Immediate regeneration places the new birth prior to faith, claiming the former to be the cause of the latter. So if a righteous state before God is attained by means of faith, then this state must follow regeneration. As explained before, this is the opposite of what one should expect. Legal clearance should be a necessary condition for regeneration, not an effect of it. The various mediate regeneration theories can avoid this problem because they place faith prior to regeneration, and could therefore place justification prior to regeneration also. It is perhaps for this reason that mediate regeneration and instrumental justification are oftentimes accompanying doctrines. However, the compatibility of these doctrines with each other does little to rectify the incompatibility of mediate regeneration with the scriptures. All the scriptural evidence favoring immediate regeneration simultaneous weighs against instrumental justification.

8) Elect infants dying in infancy cannot be justified by an act of evangelical faith, yet they must surely be accounted righteous through Christ. This leaves the instrumental position with no recourse but to either declare these cases exceptional or to say it is the *habit* of faith – not evangelical faith – that serves as the actual means of rendering one righteous. Here “habit” is used with a secondary definition wherein it conveys the idea of being *inhabited* by a prevailing disposition to Christ and spiritual things. It is also a near-equivalent to “vital union.” Now the relevance of this concept is not to be denied, and any Primitive Baptist will affirm it to be common to all born-again people. They will also insist that it is prerequisite to evangelical faith. However, the problem with this explanation is that it makes distinctions that are nowhere acknowledged by scripture in its teachings on justification. The instrumental position has once again offered an explanation *of* scripture that is not an explanation *in* scripture. Instead, when the scriptures speak of justifying faith, they repeatedly include the idea of evangelical faith.

9) As eternal salvation is unconditional in its final outcome, all necessary means thereto must be unconditional as well. A righteous state before God is surely a necessary condition for eternal salvation, so if faith is a means to attaining this state, then it follows that such faith is unconditionally given. An unconditional outcome cannot be attained by conditional means.

None will deny that God indeed gives faith in varying measures to all of His children; however, it is apparent that faith is also something to which they are exhorted, and for which they strive, and in which they are partially active, and in which they sometimes succeed and sometimes fail. So there are respects in which the child of God is both passive and active in faith, and in the final outcome, the strength of his faith, while being founded on an unconditional gift of grace, is partly conditional upon his use and development of this gift.

If “justification by faith” goes beyond a declaration and refers to the actual attainment of a righteous state before God, then the faith whereby this state is secured must be unconditionally given and man must be passive in it. Now the claim that only passive faith contributes toward justification would be credible if scriptures had ever made such a distinction. In fact they do not. Further, they sometimes present justification by faith as deriving in some meaningful way from our *active* efforts to believe on the Lord Jesus.

In proof of the last claim, consider the key passage in Habakkuk where the Lord said, “*Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith,*” (Hab 2:4). Paul made this text a cornerstone of his doctrine of justification by faith and quoted it not less than three times (Rom 1:17, Gal 3:11, Heb 10:28). However, the text in Habakkuk is stated as a rebuke of the prophet for his lack of trust and patience in the Lord. It was intended to elicit an active obedience from the prophet.

Paul also connected justification by faith with the active obedience of believing in:

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. – Gal 2:16-17

Thus, justification by faith can be a matter that men may actively pursue. This active pursuit can be further seen in:

Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. – Phil 3:8-9

So Paul desired a righteousness that was not his own, yet there was some sense in which he strove to attain it. This righteousness and the justification accompanying it are obviously connected with *active* obedience in the walk of faith.

We would not expect the scriptures to command men to perform conditions to achieve a salvation that is everywhere else described as an unconditional gift of grace. But it is reasonable to suppose that by means of a faithful walk toward God, men could *know* their interest in this salvation and experience its joy. And this is precisely the position taken by the Baptists of old on this important subject of justification by faith. Faith, they said, is not a contributing factor toward the attainment of a righteous state before God. Only the blood of Christ does this. But

faith in Jesus Christ is the divinely ordained certificate of a righteous state before God, and it is the means by which God declares to us our personal interest in Jesus Christ and our righteousness in Him alone. Through our active exercise of this gift of faith, our righteous standing before God through Jesus Christ is declared all the more convincingly; our assurance is strengthened and our joy made full.

Every true Christian is engaged daily in the struggle to walk with faith and to do so with greater conviction. This is oftentimes an arduous battle because the oppositions of Satan are numerous and formidable. Every true Christian will readily profess that his ability to believe is an unmerited gift of the grace of God. Yet he knows within himself that his doubts, fears and other failings of faith are owing to his own weakness and corruption. This shows he is *actively* engaged in the battle. He is not altogether passive in his faith. Now if the instrumental view of justification by faith were true, so that faith were the divinely-applied instrument whereby men are made righteous in the eyes of God, then one would expect the scriptures to distinguish between these passive and active components of faith, and to attribute the righteous state to the passive component alone. The scriptures do not delineate between these components when speaking on this subject. Instead they have the justification that is by faith deriving from both. This fact militates hard against the instrumental view and weighs heavily in favor of the evidentiary view.

10) While the scriptures affirm that great things can be accomplished by believing or by having faith, it is readily understood in these cases that the belief itself does not affect the event, but it is the *obedience* of believing that is effectual. Apart from this consideration, it is always the case that belief of a truth derives from that truth and cannot contribute toward making it true. It is contrary to reason to suppose that believing something to be true when it is not true can make it true. The instrumental position commits this error. It has a condemned man being absolved by means of his believing that he is absolved. If the man is truly condemned as is affirmed, then his belief is merely a denial of this truth, and should therefore only exacerbate his condemnation. The evidentiary position is far more logical. It affirms that a man believes he is absolved in Christ because this is in fact the case, and that his belief is a confirmation of the fact.

11) While the obedience of faith surely derives from a gift of God, it becomes our possession once given, and the scriptures therefore repeatedly refer to it as *our faith* (Lk 17:5, Heb 10:23 & 12:2, 1Jn 5:4) and *your faith* (Rom 1:8, 1Cor 2:5, Eph 1:15, Col 2:5, 1Thes 1:8, etc.). Yet Paul stated it was the obedience of Christ alone that secured a righteous state before God: “*For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous,*” (Rom 5:19). Therefore, a righteous state before God cannot be dependent upon the human obedience of faith.

As for Paul's claim that “*by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous,*” the word “shall” does not imply that a righteous standing before God is yet to be attained for the elect; rather, he is either speaking relative to the time of the fall, or else he is looking forward to the time when Christ's accomplishments will be fully realized. In only the prior verse he spoke of justification before God as being a completed fact: “*Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life,*” (vs 18). The same is done in the verse that follows: “*Moreover*

the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound,” (vs 20).

12) While the instrumental view correctly claims that Old Testament saints were accounted righteous prior to the sacrifice of Christ upon the divine purpose to fulfill the latter event, advocates of this position typically deny any such accounting prior to faith. This is an apparent inconsistency because the purpose to give faith was no less certain with God than His purpose to make Christ a sacrifice for sin. So this position has God considering His foreordination and foresight with respect to one event while ignoring it with respect to the other. If advocates of the instrumental view were to remedy this problem by allowing imputed righteousness on the basis of *foreseen* faith, they would then be resorting to a concept for which there is no scriptural support. The Bible never speaks of any man being justified by prospective faith, though it does speak of men being accounted righteous by the prospective sacrifice of Christ (Rom 3:25, 4:1-3). Now if both are factors to a righteous state before God, then there is no reason why one should be considered prior to the fact while the other should not. As they are indeed treated differently in this respect, it appears they are not both contributing factors. This observation supports the claim of the evidentiary position that a righteous state before God is established by the blood of Christ alone and that faith declares the fact.

13) Those variations of the instrumental view claiming that men are rendered righteous by means of evangelical faith have difficulty with the fact that Cornelius was considered cleansed by God before the gospel ever reached him. When the Lord commanded Peter to preach to Cornelius, and when Peter was not disposed to go, considering Gentiles to be unclean, the scripture then said, *“And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common,”* (Acts 10:15). The words *“hath cleansed”* definitely convey the idea that Cornelius had already been rendered righteous through the blood of Christ.

14) As the transaction producing a righteous state before God must be perfect with respect to its outcome, it follows that the transaction itself must be flawless in every phase. Human faith is never flawless, and is therefore unqualified as an instrument for the transaction.

The same imperfections are seen in human preaching, and this fact potentially compounds the difficulty of the instrumental position. If it is claimed that preaching is the divine instrument by which justifying faith is secured, and if this faith is taken to be the instrument by which a righteous state before God is secured, then it would follow that God uses two instruments in this matter, but with both being potentially flawed. This is not what one should expect when it is impossible to conceive of any divine work in which perfection were more essential than the legal cleansing of the elect before God.

Children of God, upon seeing the imperfections in their faith, as well as in all things they do, are moved to put their trust in Christ alone, and not to depend upon anything in themselves, including their faith itself. This is a remarkable aspect of faith. It tends to become strengthened in its weakness and perfected in its own imperfection. When the child of God acknowledges his weakness of faith, he perceives a greater need of the mercy of God through the blood of Jesus, and this, strangely, is an increase of faith. Now the fact that faith has this inherent tendency to disclaim itself is a strong testimonial from the conscience that it is not a causative factor toward

securing a righteous state before God. Yet the same consideration makes it the perfect criterion for powerfully confirming a saved state. Because faith has a nature to be resurrected in its own death, it is inherently indestructible, and through this process of dying only to rise again, and in greater power, it increasingly magnifies the Lord. At the same time, faith is utterly impossible in unregenerate men, because a man cannot truly believe anything that is contradicted by his own reasoning and experience. So nothing could be more sensible than for God to make faith the supreme criterion by which a saved state is known, but the same reasoning leading to this conclusion militates against it being a causative factor to a righteous state before God.

15) James claimed that justification is by both works and faith (Js 2:14-26), whereas Paul claimed it is by faith without works (Rom 3:28, 4:1-25). These claims can be reconciled by understanding that James was referring to works as they confirm faith, whereas Paul was referring to works when viewed independently of faith. Paul was also disclaiming the idea that works can serve as a grounds for true righteousness before God. James claimed that faith without works is dead because it is not truly faith, and therefore cannot denote a gracious state. Works without faith are dead because they are unacceptable to God, so these do not evidence a gracious state either. Now works done in faith justify only in the sense of manifesting a gracious state. They are not instrumental in any sense. James said nothing to indicate that faith justifies in any other sense.

This is not to say that faith and good works have equal roles in denoting a righteous state before God. Faith is the supreme criterion by which such a state is known. Good works are an *evidence* of eternal life, but true faith is *confirmation* of it.

16) As faith is done away in heaven (1Cor 13:9-13), but our righteousness before God is not, it follows that the latter is not dependent on the former.

17) The sin of Adam was imputed to his posterity without consideration to their knowledge or consent. If the righteousness given by Christ to His posterity is truly analogous, as is asserted by Romans 5, then it must also have been done without consideration to their knowledge or consent.

18) All would agree that the book of Romans ranks second to none for the depths of its treatment on this subject. When introducing the subject, Paul stated:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. – Rom 1:16-17

This statement claims that the righteousness of God, meaning His imputed righteousness, is *revealed* by faith. It is not said to be *applied* by faith, as implied by the instrumental view. Had the instrumental view been intended, this would have been an ideal place to have stated it.

19) The instrumental position commonly argues that the Greek of Rom 3:25, 5:1, etc. implies an instrument role of faith as opposed to it being a cause or basis. A problem with this argument is that scriptures also speak of justification by *grace* (Rom 3:24 & Tit 3:7) and of justification by *blood* (Rom 5:9), but does so in Greek terms that are much the same as those sometimes used

when speaking of the role of *faith* (e.g. Php 3:9). Hence, there was no intent on the part of Paul to convey the instrumental position via some systematic use of Greek terms and structures.

20) The scriptures never state that men are justified *by means of* faith; rather, they simply state that men are justified by faith and that this faith is *counted for* righteousness. With respect to the latter claim, the meaning must either be: a) Faith is a basis for righteousness. b) Faith is a token or confirmation of righteousness. c) Faith is a means unto righteousness. The first idea is disclaimed by all parties. The second idea is claimed by the evidentiary view. The third idea is the instrumental view. Of these three interpretations, the instrumental view construes the words in the most unnatural way. For example, a diploma is *counted for* graduation and so are academic qualifications, but not books, pencils, lectures and *means* unto those qualifications. A Congressional Medal of Honor is *counted for* heroism and patriotism, and the same may be said of the dedication, self-sacrifice and bravery warranting the medal, but one would not say that the guns, hand grenades, tanks, etc. were *counted for* heroism. Abstractly stated, means unto an end are not *counted for* that end, or at least not when they are contemplated as means, because this would confound the very distinction intended between means and ends.

The evidentiary position is stated with particular clarity in:

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise. – Eph 1:11-13

Hence, the consequence of believing is to be “sealed” with the Holy Spirit of promise. By “sealed” the apostle meant “certified,” and the allusion was to the practice of ancient authorities to certify documents by attaching a piece of clay and stamping it with a signet. Now a certificate could be a highly prized possession, yet it contributes nothing toward what it certifies. For example, a diploma is prized by all who have it and is desired by those who do not, but a diploma never read a book nor passed an exam nor was it ever a means to such. It certifies that academic qualifications have been met, but is neither a cause nor means unto those qualifications. The same is true of belief in Jesus Christ. It certifies that a man is saved, and is therefore his prized possession, but it is neither a cause nor means toward what it certifies.

Some Objections Considered

Q1) Whereas Rom 8:29 places justification after effectual calling, and 1Cor 6:11 places it after sanctification, would this not imply that justification follows faith?

A) The issue is not whether justification follows faith. It surely does in the declarative sense. The issue is whether faith is a means contributing to the righteousness it declares.

Q2) Since Eph 2:8 states that we are saved by grace “*through faith*,” does it not follow that faith is a means unto our righteousness in Christ before God?

A) This objection does not prove the instrumental position; rather, it interprets the text from the perspective of that position. Yet much in the context favors the evidentiary view. This view says all of the elect family were rendered righteous at once and *together*, whereas the instrumental position has this happening at different times for different people. Now the verses leading up to 2:8 have emphasized the fact that all the elect family were quickened *together* with Christ and raised up *together* with Christ, then in verses that follow, they are made one in Christ and *together* reconciled unto God through the body of Christ. As it seems impossible that God could be reconciled to the corporate body without being reconciled to the individuals within it, the powerful suggestion is that each and all were accounted righteous *together*. When Paul said all elect were quickened together in Christ, the meaning is that the way to their quickening was made sure, which would at least imply that all legal claims against them were met.

The words “*saved through faith*” derive from the fact that salvation can never be experienced where it is not perceived. Even a man in heaven itself could not be saved without the eyes and ears to perceive his locale. Almost never do the scriptures describe a man as “saved” until he has been brought into the knowledge of what has been done in his behalf. It is in this sense that he is “*saved through faith*.” Accordingly, the elect were not “saved” at Calvary under the scriptural meaning of the term. Instead, it was there that the way to their salvation was made sure.

Q3) Rom 4:2-3 states, “*For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.*” Does this not cause righteousness to follow faith?

A) Indeed it does, but not in any way that would support the instrumental position. Nothing in the statement would suggest that the faith of Abraham was a mere *means* unto the final effect. The statement asserts too much for this. Indeed, it asserts so much that even Arminians feel compelled to qualify it in their explanations. Now there are only two possible conclusions that intuitive interpretation of the words will allow: a) That his faith was of sufficient merit in itself to serve in lieu of good works and to expiate for all his faults and failures, leaving him a righteous man, or b) That his faith was here ordained by God as the certification of righteousness he acquired from another source. Simply stated, he was either righteous *because of* his faith, or else he was *demonstrably* righteous *because of* his faith. Faith here is not a mere means to the conclusion; it is the very basis of that conclusion, which leaves us with no reasonable recourse but the second of our two alternatives. Not even Arminians accept the first.

This conclusion is further supported when the context of Gn 15:6 is considered. This is the scripture from which Paul argued his case here. We have it upon New Testament authority that this ancient event concerning Abraham was intended by God to portend far greater things to come, even His ultimate purpose and plan for the salvation of His people. The Old Testament assertion that Abraham’s faith was accounted to him for righteousness has a distinguishing peculiarity that suggests profoundness. The statement was calculated to capture the attention and intrigue the mind. One of the first questions it provokes has to do the timing of its occurrence. This was not the first time God made promise to Abraham concerning Christ, nor the first time that Abraham believed it. All this happened in Gn 12:3, and the fact that Abraham sincerely believed on that earlier event would be powerfully confirmed by him leaving his home and people and moving to a land wherein he was a stranger. This shows that, in the literal sense,

Abraham was regenerated long prior to Gn 15:6, making it inconceivable that he could still be accounted condemned. But I will disregard this fact for the sake of argument and consider only the symbolic aspects of the message.

So for what symbolic purpose was the reckoning of righteousness deferred to the later event? A likely explanation can be found in the verses leading up to Gn 15:6 where Melchizedec, a strong type of Christ, went to Abraham carrying bread and wine for the purpose of blessing him. Bread and wine would of course be the very symbols used in the New Testament to represent the body and blood of the Lord. The Bible then follows this with the account of Abraham believing and his faith being reckoned for righteousness. The New Testament would make both these events important allegorical lessons concerning eternal redemption. Now if we consider these events together, and in the order in which they occurred, the symbolic message would be that Christ became part of Abraham when he partook the symbols of Christ's body and blood, and Abraham was then in possession of His righteousness. "*Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day,*" (Jn 6:54-55). Yet, because this accounting in Christ would otherwise be unknowable outside the mind of God, it was needful to men that there be a visible confirmation of this work, which will explain why the symbolic lesson continued with the faith of Abraham being reckoned to him for righteousness. Thus, the complete lesson strongly supports the evidentiary position in its claim that faith is imputed for righteousness in the sense of giving it visible certification.

Q4) Rom 4:23-24 states, "*Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead...*" Do not the words "*shall be*" imply the imputation of righteousness is contingent on faith?

A) The intent of this text is to show that our own case is parallel to that of Abraham, so the answer given to the prior question is sufficient for this one also. However, it may be added that the text embraces *ongoing* believers, not merely prospective ones, and only two verses later the same individuals are described as *already* justified by faith. Practically all doctrines of justification agree that the ongoing believer is already accounted as righteous and justified. So the words "*shall be*" either refer to ultimate benefits (e.g. acquittal at the final judgment) or, what is more likely, they are anticipatory relative to the times of Abraham. For example, the same Greek word for "shall" is translated in Gal 3:23 as "should afterwards."

The True Importance of Justification By Faith

When the evidentiary position says the role of faith is to confirm a righteous state, not to produce it, critics react by accusing the position of reducing the principle of justification by faith to the subjective business of assurance. They say this cannot possibly assign to faith the significance it is given in the Bible. These criticisms would have merit if true but are actually far from it. The evidentiary position assigns to faith an importance second only to the causes that produce it.

In the matter of assurance, a man may question *himself*, but he is never to question: "*He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life,*" (Jn 5:24). This principle is both

objective and absolute, and stands regardless of whether a man doubts himself or is sure. Being justified by faith and having assurance are connected ideas but are not the same. A man may question whether what he feels in his heart is the genuine divine stamp, but he can always be sure that the genuine divine stamp is in fact faith in Jesus Christ. This is the divinely-ordained certificate of a blood-washed man. A man may have all assurance in the world, but if no faith in Jesus Christ, then his assurance is delusional, and he may have all doubt in the world, yet if truly believing on Jesus Christ, then his doubts are equally delusional.

All assurance that any man has of heaven must ultimately be anchored in the principle of justification by faith. So this principle is not assurance but is what makes true assurance possible. The eternal blessings described in the Bible are intended only to those having faith. Also, the temporal blessings of God offer no assurance except to those having faith. A man cannot base his hope of heaven on the fact that God has caused his corn to grow. This is because God causes His rain to fall on both the just and the unjust. We must also allow that any temporal blessing presumed to be our own may have actually been intended for someone else. Laban was blessed with prosperity, but he knew it was on account of Jacob, not himself. For such reasons, temporal blessings of themselves do not convey assurance. It is the principle of justification by faith that transforms them into treasure having eternal implications. When the farmer rejoices to see his prayer answered with the falling rain on his corn, and when he is moved by this to a greater trust in God and in the name of His Son in which he prayed, then the blessing of the rain is moved beyond the mere production of corn to a promise of infinitely more. The providence of God in his behalf has upheld and strengthened his faith, and then the principle of justification by faith carried this to a true assurance of heaven. In absence of this principle, all providence of God in our behalf would bear no implications except what would eventually return to dust.

Such assurances are the *sine-quo-non* of all real confidence, peace, hope and joy. Any presumed temporal blessing that does not convey true assurance will soon return to dust. Any blessing that conveys it is of greater value than the Universe itself. Assurance is the greatest and only enduring benefit that can derive from any temporal blessing. For example, if a man has a malignant tumor, but is healed by a merciful God who hears his prayer, that man will still know that in sufficient time he will be just as dead as if his request had been denied. The enduring benefit of the healing is that it shows the love of God for him, and since the love of God is eternal, only one such blessing would mean infinitely more than all other pleasures of life combined. This explains why our happiness hinges on assurance. A child of God can happily walk through hell if confident that Jesus is holding his hand, but no amount of luxury can alleviate his misery if he feels God-forsaken. So assurance is a crucial matter, and if the principle of justification by faith is necessary to make it real, then it is not to be confused with assurance itself, but is the all-important foundation upon which assurance must be built.

These observations serve to explain Paul's famous and intriguing statement: "*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,*" (Heb 11:1). Hence, faith is not hope but is the foundation of hope. It is not in lieu of evidence but is evidence itself, serving as palpable proof of what could not otherwise be knowable to human sense. As the visible world serves as evidence of an invisible God (vs 3), so heartfelt faith serves as evidence of a salvation that cannot always be felt in a world of sin and sorrow.

In his profound statement concerning faith recorded here, Paul said nothing of it being a means or instrument to making a man righteous. Rather, he said, “*For by it the elders obtained a good report,*” (vs 2). While the Old Testament saints were generally people of upright character, the Bible placed too much emphasis on their faults and failings to have intended to distinguish them by their works. Rather, they were set apart from others in their wicked world in that they looked to the Lord for mercy, for forgiveness, for correction, for understanding, for help, for assurance and for salvation. This is why they were also the people who witnessed and experienced the greatest workings of God the world had ever known, many of which the Apostle would recount in the remainder of this chapter. Yet their faith was not the ultimate cause of these things, nor even an instrument to bringing them to pass; rather, the opposite was true. Their faith, oftentimes being weakest at the most crucial points, was revived and strengthened by these mighty works of God. And indeed, those mighty works were no doubt done also for the purpose of strengthening faith in millions thereafter. So whether it be the faith or the mighty works observed by the faith, both were by the hand of God. Yet God, in the interest of His own glory, has ordered and ordained that these things accompany each other.

Now the joyous revelation of the New Testament, beginning with the teachings of the Savior Himself, is that the marriage God has ordained between faith and His mighty works is not limited to parting seas, swimming axe heads, tamed lions and other such temporal marvels, but it also extends into eternity itself, accompanying the mighty workings of God in the *eternal* salvation of His people. So that as we look upon any Old Testament saint in retrospect, we can see that his faith not only accompanied temporal wonders, but that in such faith “*he obtained witness that he was righteous*” (vs 4) – not comparatively but absolutely. Obviously not of himself, but through the capstone of all divine wonders – the eternal salvation of God’s people through our Lord Jesus Christ.

THE EXTENT OF EVANGELISM

In this chapter I will consider the question of whether all mentally competent elect will be evangelized. By “evangelized” I mean taught from the scriptural letter and thereby brought to a profession of faith. In what follows, when I speak of “universal evangelism” or “universal evangelization,” I am referring to the idea among certain Calvinists that the preached gospel will be brought to all mentally competent elect. The reason for the qualification “mentally competent” is that most Christians agree that God has a way of salvation for those who are mentally undeveloped or impaired. Their explanations for how God does this can be varied, and are not always well-founded in reason or scripture; nonetheless, nearly all of them arrive at the same conclusion. The situation becomes very different when considering the mentally responsible portion of the unevangelized population. There are a substantial number of both Arminians and Calvinists who contend that all such people are condemned and hell-bound. Indeed, this may be a majority opinion on both sides. However, I am happy to show in this chapter that it is not a unanimous opinion, and that it was not the opinion of important Christians of the past, and that it has never been the opinion of Primitive Baptists. Most importantly, I hope to show it is not the position of scripture.

It is important to understand what is not at issue on this subject. There are many questions that are so clearly settled by scripture that none should doubt them. The first is whether Christ is the only way to heaven. He surely is. The issue is only whether Christ can reach people without the aid or instrumentality of human preachers. There is no question whatsoever that a man must in fact be reached by Christ in order to be saved. Accordingly, it is understood that none can be saved to heaven without being rendered righteous through the death of Christ and being regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Second, the question is not whether there is any saving efficacy in non-Christian religion. These religions may be useful insofar as they teach good works, but they are powerless to save anyone from their sins, and are more apt to only exacerbate their condemnation. These religions are therefore neither causes nor means nor indicators of salvation. Third, there is no question about the fact that born-again people are profoundly different from others in that they are powerfully disposed to believe, repent and obey. The cases being considered are of ignorant, unevangelized people who would have better manifested such traits under gospel instruction. Fourth, there is no question about the clear scriptural principle that believers are saved and unbelievers are damned. The only issue here is the meaning of the term “unbeliever.” It doubtlessly includes those who know and reject what the Bible says about Jesus being Lord, Savior, etc, but it is a harsh position that applies this term to the condemnation of those who never had opportunity to hear of Jesus Christ. All acknowledge that a man cannot believe what he has never heard (Rom 10:14), but it is equally true that he cannot disbelieve what he has never heard. Fifth, there is no issue with the claim that true belief in Jesus Christ is the sole means of *knowing* that a man is saved. Other virtues may give reason to entertain hope, but the sure promise of salvation is only to the believer. Because of this fact, it is important to understand that the issue is one of principle and not of statistics. Since we cannot certainly know that a particular person is saved without observing faith in Jesus Christ, neither can we certainly know whether saved persons in the unevangelized world are many or few. The issue is whether *any* of them are saved, not about *how many* of them are saved.

The case of the unevangelized is an issue that many Christians prefer to avoid. Indeed, some say we should not even pursue it. They argue that God has simply commanded us to evangelize, and this we should do so with full diligence, not even asking what would happen if we refused or failed. I fully acknowledge the importance of this commandment, but to dismiss the issue with such an argument is not credible. One could say with equal propriety that God has simply prohibited us from sinning, and that we should not even ask what would happen if we did. Such an argument would of course reduce the gospel to irrelevance. The fact is that we do sin, and this why the gospel is relevant, and it is also a fact that we do not preach the gospel to all, and this is why the present issue is relevant.

Surely, anyone can see the importance of the issue from a practical perspective. The unevangelized are multitudinous, starting with all who lived prior to New Testament times. While many will dispute this, saying there was sufficient gospel even in the Old Testament to consider some of that era to have been evangelized, the fact is that most who make this argument would consider almost anyone today as being hell-bound if their knowledge were no better than what Old Testament saints possessed. Besides, the Old Testament was not handed to Adam in Eden. Millions lived and died before any significant portion of it had been inspired. The unevangelized also include infants dying in infancy and the mentally impaired. Christians can only pretend these persons belong to an exceptional class. There is no scriptural basis for supposing their case to be any different from other unevangelized people. Finally, add the billions of competent people in the New Testament era to whom the gospel was never carried.

The real reason most Christians prefer to avoid this issue is because it exposes defects in their doctrinal systems. Nearly all of them teach that eternal salvation is in some way or another accomplished through the means of other humans. The unevangelized are obviously those that humans either could not reach or did not reach. So these Christians must either be consistent with their own claims and insist that all such people were damned, or be inconsistent with their own claims and admit that some such people were saved contrary to the assertions of their doctrine. Since neither alternative is attractive to them, they prefer to avert the issue altogether.

Even the majority of Calvinists affirm that salvation is through human means, though they claim these human “instruments” only act out what God had predestined to be done. This implies that the only consistent explanation Calvinists can offer for all these unevangelized people is that they were eternally damned. Absence of gospel conversion is owing to absence of divine predestination to such effect, and is therefore *prima-facie* evidence that all such were non-elect and could not have been helped anyway. But this claim is so bold and calloused that even Calvinists are loathe to make it. It is also an explanation that very conveniently projects blame for the ignorance of these deprived people on God, whereas Christian conscience is not apt to feel so exonerated. So, the Calvinist almost invariably averts these loathsome conclusions by inventing what he commonly called “extraordinary” means. That is, God’s ordinary means of saving are what the Calvinist claims, and anything that would contradict this is to be considered as “extraordinary.” There are two problems with this: This first is that scripture says not a word to endorse the idea that God has ordinary means and extraordinary means. The second is that, to any sound thinker, exceptions are one of the primary ways of exposing a defective theory.

But the predicament of the Calvinist is small in comparison to that of the Arminian. This doctrine teaches that God loved all men to the extent that He gave His Son to die for them, yet, strangely, He was content to leave millions of them destitute of other alleged necessities for their salvation. This is doubtlessly one of the greatest contradictions ever advanced by anything calling itself a religion. If God loved enough to sacrifice His own Son, then any other necessity would have been trivial and automatic. Arminians can also add to their list of challenges the multitudes who were cut down in youth by battle, disease and tragedy, but before being brought to a profession of faith. These surely were not offered the same opportunity as those who lived full lives, but the very premises of the Arminian system demand that some of them could have turned to Christ had they been blessed with the same longevity as others. All this shows how hypocritical Arminianism is when charging Calvinism with unfairness.

All these doctrinal problems are averted when one submits to the simple idea that salvation is altogether of the Lord. As shown in prior chapters, all the elect family of God were rendered righteous by the death of Christ alone, and they will all be quickened to spiritual life by the Holy Spirit alone. Men can neither aid this nor hinder it. Now, as Jesus promised, these doctrinal truths “*make you free*” (Jn 8:32) to consider the possibility that Almighty God can and does save in places where human preachers cannot go. My ultimate intent in this chapter is to show that the Bible says more to address this subject than most Christians think, and that it says enough that we need not doubt that Christ indeed saves even among the unevangelized.

Various Theologians Denying Universal Evangelization

In this section I will present and examine the opinions of some generally respected Calvinistic theologians who denied the universal evangelization of the elect. These men were not all Baptists, yet are considered by orthodox Baptists as being sound in most points of doctrine. Nonetheless, in the numerous quotes provided here, the reader should not assume that any more is being endorsed than what is explicitly endorsed.

J. Oliver Buswell was a Presbyterian theologian from America. His work entitled A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion was published in 1964. Concerning the case of the unevangelized he said:

But what kind of conviction can there be for savages who have never had an understanding of the Gospel? Frankly, I do not know. Neither do I know what kind of conviction came to Abel, to Enoch, or even to Abraham. But I do know that they were convicted by the same Holy Spirit, that they were justified by faith, and thus we know that they are among the elect of God.

Certainly no one can either believe or disbelieve without some knowledge. Dr. Machen used to say, “It is impossible for a man to believe with an empty head.” But I do not know how much knowledge is necessary for faith. In this I refer not merely to the Old Testament saints, but to ignorant believers in extremely dark circumstances even in America today. The essence of a childlike faith is a simple surrender of oneself to the grace of God in Christ. I do not know how simple that surrender may be, but I do know that Abraham “believed God, and it was reckoned to him for justification” (Romans 4:3, quoting Genesis 15:6).

I do not mean to say that I believe that every savage in the jungle has anything like the light which Abraham had. I do believe however that, as God sees the matter, every savage in the

jungle is some way or another confronted with the grace of God in the universal convicting work of the Holy Spirit, that he makes a choice for which God is justified, even in our finite minds, according to God's revelation – God is justified in holding him responsible.

Heinrich Heppe (Op. cit. p. 514) quotes the Leiden Synopsis (1581, sixth edition, 1652) as follows; "God does not always supply the two methods of calling possible to Himself (i.e. outward and inward calling), but calls some to Him only by the inner light and leading of the Holy Spirit without the ministry of His outward Word. This method of calling is of course *per se* sufficient for salvation, but very rare, extraordinary, and unknown to us." – ("Soteriology," p 160-161)

I would not agree that the Holy Spirit is involved in any "universal convicting work," but would agree that all men are deliberate and accountable sinners. I do not understand that inward calling is "extraordinary, and unknown to us," but would consider it common to all elect. It is probable that Buswell intended nothing different. As for the confident claim made by this quote that inward calling "very rarely" occurs without being followed by outward calling, this is possibly true, but I do not know of any scripture that the writer could use to prove it.

The next theologian I shall quote is Augustus H. Strong (1836-1921) from his work Systematic Theology. He was a Calvinistic Baptist of America. His book was first published in 1886:

That the object of saving faith is, in general, the whole truth of God, so far as it is objectively revealed or made known to the soul; but, in particular the person and work of Jesus Christ, which constitutes the centre and substance of God's revelation (Acts 17:18, 1Cor 1:23, Col 1:27, Rev 19:10).

The patriarchs, though they had no knowledge of a personal Christ, were saved by believing in God so far as God had revealed himself to them; and whoever among the heathen are saved, must in like manner be saved by casting themselves as helpless sinners upon God's plan of mercy, dimly shadowed forth in nature and providence. But such faith, even among the patriarchs and heathen, is implicitly a faith in Christ, and would become explicit and conscious trust and submission, whenever Christ were made known to them (Mat 8:11,12; John 10:16; Acts 4:12; 10:31,34,35,44; 16:31).

When Strong speaks of faith in God, he should not be misconstrued as saying faith in "a" God. Also, when he said the patriarchs had no knowledge of a "personal" Christ, he would have done better to say they had no knowledge of an "historical" Christ. Further, when he speaks of "God's plan of mercy, dimly shadowed forth in nature and providence," the greater emphasis should be placed on "providence," or more precisely, on regeneration and internal revelation. Strong then added some important footnotes:

Saving faith is not belief in a dogma, but personal trust in a personal Christ. It is therefore possible to a child... The object of faith is sometimes represented in the N.T. as being God the Father. John 5:24 – "He that heareth my word and believeth on him that sent me, hath eternal life"; Rom 4:5 – to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness." We can explain these passages only when we remember that Christ is God "manifested in the flesh" (1Tim 3:16), and that "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). Man may receive a gift without knowing from whom it comes, or how much it has cost. So the heathen, who casts himself as a sinner on God's mercy, may receive salvation

from the Crucified One, without knowing who is the giver, or that the gift was purchased by agony and blood. Denny, *Studies in Theology*, 154, “No N.T. writer ever *remembered* Christ. They never thought of him as belonging to the past. Let us not preach about the *historical* Christ, but rather, about the *living* Christ; nay, let us preach *him* present and omnipotent. Jesus could say: ‘Whither I go, ye know the way’ (John 14:4); for they knew *him*, and he was both the *end* and the *way*.”

Primitive Baptists would explain that those having faith, and who cast themselves as sinners upon God’s mercy, do so because they have *already* been born again. When Strong spoke of Christ as yet living, his obvious intent was to convey the idea that Christ preaches to the hearts of men today even as He did in the days of His flesh, and thereby makes Himself known to men in possibly an obscure but effectual way. This qualified Strong’s earlier statement that “Man may receive a gift without knowing from whom it comes...” Strong then added:

Since Christ is the Word of God and the truth of God, he may be received even by those who have not heard of his manifestation in the flesh. A proud and self-righteous morality is inconsistent with saving faith; but a humble and penitent reliance upon God, as a Savior from sin and a guide of conduct, is an implicit faith in Christ; for such reliance casts itself upon God, so far as God has revealed himself, – and the only Revealer of God is Christ. We have, therefore, the hope that even among the heathen, there may be some, like Socrates, who, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit working through the truth of nature and conscience, have found the way of life and salvation. – (p 842-843)

Strong then quoted Mt 8:11,12; John 10:16, and Acts 4:12; 10:31,34,35,44 in defense of his view. He also stated his opinion that such cases of salvation are few in number. He then gave numerous experiences in the evangelical field that would indicate regeneration prior to the hearing of the word, though Strong was himself a teacher of gospel regeneration.

The last theologian I shall quote is W.G.T. Shedd, who was born in Massachusetts in 1820, and was raised among the Puritans but later united with the Presbyterians. His work was entitled Dogmatic Theology:

The extension of the work of redemption into the future world is made to rest very much, for its support, upon the cases of the heathen and of infants. Respecting the former, it is certain that the heathen are voluntary transgressors of the moral law, and therefore have no claim upon the Divine mercy. Scripture teaches that they perish because of their sin, and impenitence in sin. It is wicked to sin, and still more wicked not to repent of it. The heathen are chargeable with both... There is, consequently, no ground for asserting that justice and obligation require that the pardon of sins be tendered to the heathen in the next life.

It does not follow, however, that because God is not obliged to offer pardon to the unevangelized heathen, either here or hereafter, therefore no unevangelized heathen are pardoned. The electing mercy of God reaches to the heathen. It is not the doctrine of the Church, that the entire mass of pagans, without exception, have gone down to endless impenitence and death. That some unevangelized men are saved, in the present life, by an extraordinary exercise of redeeming grace in Christ, has been the hope and belief of Christendom. It was the hope and belief of the elder Calvinists, as it is of the later. The Second Helvetic Confession (I. 7), after the remark that the ordinary mode of salvation is by the instrumentality of the written words, adds: “At the same time we recognize that God can illuminate whom and when he will, Even without the external

ministry, for that is in his power; but we speak of the usual way of instructing men, delivered unto us from God, both by commandment and examples.” ... One of the strictest Calvinists of the sixteenth century, Zanchius, whose treatise on predestination was translated by Toplady, after remarking that many nations have never had the privilege of hearing the word, says (Ch IV.) that “it is not indeed improbable that some individuals in these unenlightened countries may belong to the secret election of grace, and the habit of faith may be wrought in them.” By the term “habit” (*habitus*), the elder theologians meant an inward disposition of the heart. The “habit of faith” involves penitence for sin, and the longing for its forgiveness and removal. The “habit of faith” is the broken and contrite heart, which expresses itself in the prayer, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” It is certain that the Holy Ghost can produce, if he please, such a disposition and frame of mind in a pagan, without employing, as he commonly does, the written word...

Shedd then went on to cite the blind man of John 9, Cornelius of Acts 10 and the Ethiopian eunuch of Acts 8 as being men having the “habit of faith” before the preached word reached them. He obviously meant they had already been regenerated. Shedd, incidentally, believed in immediate regeneration. Historical Primitive Baptists have also endorsed the concept of “habit of faith,” but oftentimes called it the “faith of God’s elect,” which they distinguished from “gospel faith,” or what I have called “evangelical faith.” The Second Helvetic Confession of which Shedd spoke was drawn in Switzerland (“*Helvetia*” being the Latin name for “Switzerland”) in 1561 by Heinrich Bullinger, a pupil of Zwingli. The Confession was widely received in Switzerland, France, Hungary, Poland, and Scotland, and was well received in Holland and England. By “elder Calvinists” Shedd meant the Calvinists of those times. Calvin himself lived from 1509 to 1564. Zwingli lived from 1484 to 1531. Shedd then added:

It is taught also in Matt. 8:11; Luke 13:30: “Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven, but the children of the kingdom [those who have had the written word] shall be cast out. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.” This affirmation of Christ, was called out by the “habit of faith,” or disposition to believe, in that Gentile centurion, respecting whom he said, “I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel,” Matt. 8:5-10.

The true reason for hoping that an unevangelized heathen is saved is not that he was virtuous, but that he was *penitent*. A penitent man is necessarily virtuous; but a virtuous man is not necessarily penitent. Sorrow for sin produces morality; but morality does not produce sorrow for sin. A great error is committed at this point. The Senecas, the Antonines, the Plutarchs, and such like, have been singled out as the hopeful examples in paganism. It is not for man to decide what was the real state of the heart; but the writings of these men do not reveal the sense of sin; do not express penitence; do not show a craving for redemption. There is too much egotism, self-consciousness, and self-righteousness in them. The man, judged by his books, is moral, but proud. He is virtuous, but plumes himself upon it. This is not a hopeful characteristic, when we are asking what are the prospects of a human soul, before the bar of God. “To this man will I look, saith the Lord, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word,” Isa. 66: 2. “Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven,” Mat. 5:3.

Then Shedd adds these remarks, which should be sufficient to warn any self-professed Christian who looks with contempt upon the heathen, as did the Pharisee on the poor publican (Lk 18:10-14), and considers himself more righteous for having had the advantage of the preached word. I will also add that immediately after the account of the Pharisee and publican, Luke related how that Christ rebuked His disciples for forbidding infants from being brought to Him. It is

probably by no accident that these two things were mentioned together so as to warn and humiliate all who would glory in their knowledge. Shedd said:

This line of remark holds good in Christendom, as well as in Heathendom. There is a class of men in modern society marked by morality, and lofty self-respect, but by no consciousness of sin, and no confession of it. And judged by New Testament principles, no class of mankind is farther off from the kingdom of heaven. There is no class that scorns the publican's cry, and spurns the atoning blood, with such decision and energy as they. To them, the words of Christ, in a similar case, apply: "The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of heaven before you," Matt 21:31. The Magdalene is nearer the Divine Pity than the Pharisee. And upon the same principle, those benighted children of ignorance and barbarism who feel their sin and degradation, and are ready to listen with docility to the missionary when he comes with the tidings of the Infinite Compassion, are nearer to heaven, than the children of a gilded and heartless civilization, who have no moral unrest, and turn a deaf ear to all the overtures of mercy.

This extraordinary work of the Holy Spirit is mentioned by the Redeemer, to illustrate the sovereignty of God in the exercise of mercy, not to guide his church in the evangelistic labor. His command is, to "preach the gospel to every creature."

Shedd then added some interesting observations about the general extent of election:

Two errors therefore, are to be avoided: First, that all men are saved; secondly, that only a few men are saved. Some fifty years ago, Schleiermacher surprised all Lutheran Germany with a defense of the Calvinistic doctrine of election; but the surprise was diminished, when it appeared that he held that God has elected, and will save, every human creature without exception. This cannot be squared with Scripture. On the other hand, some Calvinists have represented the number of the reprobated as greater than that of the elect, or equal to it. They found this upon the words of Christ, "Many are called, but few are chosen." But this describes the situation at the time when our Lord spake, and not the final result of his redemptive work. Christ himself, in the days of his flesh, called many, but few responded to the call from his gracious lips. Our Lord's own preaching was not as successful as that of his apostles, and of many of his ministers. This was a part of his humiliation, and sorrow. But when Christ shall have "seen of the travail of his soul," and been "satisfied" with what he has seen; when the whole course of the gospel shall be complete, and shall be surveyed from beginning to end; it will be found that God's elect, or church, is "a great multitude which no man can number, out of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues," and that their voice is as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, "Hallelujah, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth," Rev. 7:9; 19:6. The circle of God's election is a great circle of the heavens, and not that of a treadmill.

Many of the sentiments expressed by Shedd are exactly those of most Primitive Baptists. We can hope that Shedd's view as to the size of the elect family is true; however, the wickedness, apathy and pride of our times does not lend itself to the same optimism suggested by the times of Shedd. Whatever the case, God's children are not to seek assurance in probabilities, but in faith and obedience to Christ. My primary reason for quoting this last part is to show Shedd's interpretation of Mt 22:14, i.e. "*For many are called, but few are chosen.*" His interpretation is supported by context, because earlier in the accompanying parable when the gathering of the Gentiles was described, the number was "*as many as they found, both good and bad.*" This cannot mean a universal gathering, but it certainly does not suggest "few." Context would also

suggest the applicability of Shedd's interpretation to Lk 13:23-30, i.e. "...are there few that be saved?" In answering this question, the Lord warned the Jews:

There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last. – Lk 13:28-30

Shedd implied that the elder Calvinists had a generous view on the extent of election and the case of the unevangelized. If this is true, then it contributes toward an interesting pattern observed in church history, namely, that people in various ages have tended to form ideas about these questions on the basis of their limited perspective. The early Christians had descended from heathen parents, grandparents, etc, and bigotry between their various races was tempered by the fact that most had the commonality of being oppressed by the Romans. Therefore, these often had generous views toward the heathen. On the other hand, the early Baptists were vilified and persecuted by almost everything calling itself Christian, both Catholic and Protestant. They therefore viewed most professors as hypocrites, and tended to have a very narrow view of election. Early Primitive Baptists inherited some of this skepticism toward many religious professors. Calvinists have been a minority in modern Christendom, and their doctrines have generally encountered increasing opposition over the last two centuries. As might be expected, they tend to have a narrow view of election also. The elder Calvinists saw their doctrines sweeping the landscape like wildfire during the Reformation; consequently, their view of the spiritual state of the world was more generous. A few decades ago, most Primitive Baptists lived in quite rural communities that were almost entirely Christian and where almost everyone expressed honor for Christ and the Bible. As might be expected, they had a very generous view. Current Primitive Baptists live in a worldwide community and daily witness the depravity of man in the media, as seen in rampant rape, murder, molestation, blasphemy, and more recently, in the maliciousness of some adherents to the Islamic religion. It is therefore no surprise that their former optimism has abated. The one thing every generation had in common was a confidence that they were objective in their perspective.

Elijah greatly underestimated the number of righteous people in Israel (1Ki 19:14-18). Abraham overestimated the number of righteous people in Sodom (Gn 18:23-33). If men of this spiritual insight are capable of such miscalculations, then it is most probable that we are subject to the same errors.

The most valuable point made by these theologians was in their descriptions of those unevangelized heathen for whom we entertain hope. Those insisting all elect will be evangelized often characterize others holding the contrary view in the worst possible light. It would be typical of them to paint a picture of a savage sacrificing his own child to Molech and then charge their rivals with proclaiming such to be born-again children of God. But these are not the cases being contemplated when we say God has children in the unevangelized world. Rather, it is the penitent sinner, and the one who cries, "*God be merciful to me a sinner,*" (Lk 18:13). Such conviction, if it be true, is produced only by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. The Bible says, "*The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in*

all his thoughts” (Ps 10:4), and “*All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the LORD weigheth the spirits,*” (Prov 16:2).

Jesus was the friend of sinners. He had compassion on those who were held in contempt by those who thought themselves to be religious. He had no use for religious people who trusted in their own righteousness. He warned all saying, “*I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance,*” because He explained, “*They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick,*” (Mk 2:17). He also warned, “*So the last shall be first, and the first last...*” (Matt 20:16), teaching us to respect the sovereignty of God, under which grace will be extended where many would never expect it, and be denied to those who considered themselves most deserving.

The Lord declared, “*Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else,*” (Isa 45:22). This proclamation was made unto all who have been convicted by the Holy Spirit to see their sinfulness and need of salvation. We cannot suppose that the Holy Spirit is incapable of breaking stony hearts in even the remotest parts of the world. And when men cry from their hearts, “*God be merciful to me a sinner,*” nothing could be more perilous to ourselves than to suppose that such cries could fall on deaf ears. This is what the publican cried, and Jesus said, “*I tell you, this man went down to his house justified...*” (Lk 18:14). This publican did not cry in the name of Jesus, because he had not heard the name, but he had a truer knowledge of Him than many who have heard His name, even some with theological degrees. The Old Testament saints had not heard His name either, yet they were taught by God to know Him and their need of a Redeemer.

In the same place where the Lord proclaimed, “*Look unto me, and be ye saved...*,” He said, “*Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, ye that are escaped of the nations: they have no knowledge that set up the wood of their graven image, and pray unto a god that cannot save,*” (vs 20). It is surely an error to ascribe to our own God what He condemned in the imaginary gods of men. If one says God cannot save, or does not save, unto the ends of the earth, then this alleged god is a mere fiction, a conceptual idol, from which men should turn. It is true that the gospel should be preached to all men, but the power of that gospel can be no greater than the God it preaches. A god who can save only where men carry him, or who is confined to the use of men in performing the work, certainly cannot be the subject of a powerful gospel, particularly when it claims the Devil has no such limitations. I believe such a gospel cannot be true, and my skepticism is confirmed by the scriptural and historical evidence.

Early Christian Views

Christian literature from the first few centuries after the Apostles presents somewhat of a quandary to modern theologians. The proximity of these ancient writers to the times of the Apostles obviously gives them a degree of credibility; however, it is evident that their theology was often lacking in precision and sometimes contained outright error. Part of this was owing to the fact that the earliest post-apostolic Christians had not faced many of the issues and controversies that have since arisen. Consequently, their thinking and terminology were not sufficiently refined to delineate between points of theological subjects that would later become of great importance. For this reason, subsequent controversies have frequently seen both sides tending to find support for their views in these early writings.

A notable example of this occurred in the debate between the Arminian, Dr. Daniel Whitby (1638-1726) and the English Baptist, Dr. John Gill (1697-1771). Gill's reply to Whitby was published in an outstanding book called The Cause of God and Truth. Whitby adduced early Christian writings in support of his Arminian views, but Gill found at least as much support for his Calvinistic views from the same literature. Gill also made some important observations concerning the relevance of this literature to the ongoing Arminianism/Calvinism debate. These observations are very wise, and have a general applicability to Christian literature from all ages, including even to the writings of John Gill himself. For this reason, I have included Gill's comments in detail:

Though it will be readily owned, that the first Christian writers were men of great sobriety and simplicity, of exemplary lives and conversations, and who suffered much and bravely for the sake of the Christian religion, the verity of which they were thoroughly persuaded of; yet they do not appear to have very clear and distinct notions of the doctrines of it, at least are not very happy in expressing their sentiments of them; for as many of them were men of considerable erudition in Gentile philosophy, they had a better faculty at demolishing the Pagan scheme, than in stating, explaining, and defending the Christian faith.

Whereas the times in which these men lived, may be truly called the infancy or youth of the Christian church, and which, as it grows older, may be thought to grow in spiritual light and knowledge, as it certainly will more so before the end of the world; so these writers with more propriety may be called the young men, than the fathers of the church: and, without any detraction from their real worth and value, they were but *children*, in comparison of some of our European divines, since the reformation. And indeed there is a good deal of reason why these should have a better understanding of the Scriptures, and be more acquainted with the doctrines of the gospel; since, besides the advantage of the writings before them, they also had better helps of understanding the Bible in its original languages: for most of the Latin writers knew nothing of the Greek tongue, neither Greek nor Latin writers understood the Hebrew; but a very few indeed. And above all, they had a larger measure of the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ: for, setting aside the apostolic age itself, which was favored with an extraordinary measure of the gifts and graces of the Spirit, for the bringing forth and establishing the Christian religion in the world; there has been no age since, that has been blessed with so much spiritual and evangelical light as the times since the reformation; and it is to be hoped that it will increase yet more and more; though it must be owned, that of late a veil has been drawing over it, which God in his own time will remove.

It may be further observed, that the pens of the first Christian writers were chiefly employed against Jews and Pagans, and such heretics who opposed the doctrine of the Trinity; and who either denied the proper deity or real humanity of Christ; and therefore it is not to be expected that they should treat of the doctrines now in debate among us, any otherwise than *per transitum*, or by the bye. Besides, the doctrines of grace had never been disputed, or made the subject of controversy: Satan as yet had not done playing his first game, which was to depreciate some one or other of the divine persons in the Trinity, which lasted three or four hundred years; and then he brought on a second, and that was to cry up the power of man, in opposition to the grace of God. Now since nothing of this kind was moved in the times of those early writers, it is not to be wondered at that they should write sparingly on such subjects; or, as Austin says, should speak *securius*, "more securely," or should speak as Jerom observes of the writers before Arius, *innocenter et minus cante*, "innocently and less cautiously." His words are these; "You will say," writing to Ruffinus, "how is it that there are some things faulty in their books? If I should

answer, that I do not know the reasons of those faults, I will not immediately judge them to be heretics; for it may be that they have simply erred, or wrote with another meaning; or their writings have been corrupted by little and little, by unskillful librarians; or verily before Arius, as a meridian devil, was born in Alexandria; they spoke some things ‘innocently, and less cautiously,’ which could not avoid the calumny of perverse men.” And, for the same reason, it is no marvel, if, before the Pelagian controversy was moved, they dropped some things which were not so agreeable to the doctrines of special grace, or even to their own sentiments concerning them; since they had never been put upon the more strict examination and defense of these things, and so wrote without guard. This made Austin say, in answer to Prosper and Hilary, who moved to have the sense of former writers concerning predestination and grace, in order to stop the mouths of some cavilers; “What need is there to search into their works, who before this heresy arose, were under no necessity of troubling themselves to solve this difficult question; which without doubt they would have done, had they been obliged to answer to such things. Hence it is, that what they thought of the grace of God, they have briefly and transiently touched upon in some places of their writings, but dwelt on those things in which they disputed against other enemies of the church.” – (p 220-221)

Gill basically stated that terms like “Arminian” and “Calvinist” had limited relevance to early Christians because their theology had not achieved sufficient sophistication to make such distinctions, and this was partly because their attention had not been drawn to the issue by any controversies about it. This situation would change in later times when Augustine (i.e. “Austin”) had his famous dispute with Pelagius over the opposing doctrines which would yet later be called “Calvinism” and “Arminianism.”

The dispute between Gill and Whitby concerned all five points of the doctrines of grace, including the doctrine of limited atonement. Gill attempted to defend the doctrine by offering the fact that the gospel had been preached in very few parts of the world. He reasoned that if Christ had died for all men, then God would have provided the gospel to all men as well. Whitby attempted to circumvent this argument with the claim that the heathen can be saved without the gospel if they will obey whatever degree of light they have. Thus, Whitby was Arminian in that he held to a works system, but he modified it from its usual form to open a door for the unevangelized. It appears that some of the General Baptists of England, who were an Arminian strain, also held this view concerning the heathen.

I must object to Whitby’s approach as much as Gill did. It was an ingenious works system, and if reasoned to its logical conclusion, it would actually have the gospel contributing to the damnation of men, because if men are saved by obeying whatever light they have, then any increase to their enlightenment would only make their salvation more difficult. This is obviously absurd. There is merit to Gill’s argument that limited atonement is suggested by the fact that few men hear the gospel; however, I would not carry this argument so far as to imply that all elect will be evangelized. More will be said about Gill’s position in what follows, but attention will be focused now on how this debate involved early Christian literature.

Whitby attempted to use this early literature against all five points of grace and to support his claim of salvation among the heathen. With respect to the five points, Gill responded with 95 pages of quotes and analysis in The Cause of God and Truth; however, Gill replied with only one page on the subject of the heathen. While this one page contains worthy points, it could not

completely answer the assertion that some early Christians did believe in the existence of salvation among the heathen.

While Gill was likely correct in his claim that early Christians were theologically unsophisticated, and that they were largely naive concerning the distinctions between Arminianism and Calvinism, this argument does not seem so plausible concerning the salvation of the heathen. While the Divine methodology in salvation is a difficult subject, and is disputed even by the most intelligent and educated minds, yet nothing could be more basic than the distinction between being eternally saved and eternally damned, and it is a highly dubious claim that early Christians did not grasp it, nor entertain questions as to what had become of their heathen ancestors and friends. While there is some appearance that subsequent generations of Christians gave little thought to this question, and did not exhibit much concern about it, such a claim could not be plausibly made of the earliest generations. And if early Christian literature is of any credibility at all, and if their proximity to the times of the Apostles is of any significance whatsoever, then surely it would be concerning a simple matter such as this.

The most significant statements from these early Christians came from Justin Martyr, who is thought to have been born around the year 100, and is called “Martyr” because he was put to death, probably in Rome around 165 A.D., for his profession of Christ. It was Justin’s view that some heathen, though without the external revelation of the gospel, had possessed the internal illumination of Christ, and he therefore considered them as Christian. This can be seen in:

We have been taught that Christ is the first-born of God, and we have declared above that He is the Word of whom every race of men were partakers; and those who lived reasonably are Christians, even though they have been thought atheists; as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus, and men like them; and among the barbarians, Abraham, and Ananias, and Azarias, and Misael, and Elias, and many others whose actions and names we now decline to recount, because we know it would be tedious. So that even they who lived before Christ, and lived without reason, were wicked and hostile to Christ, and slew those who lived reasonably. – (Apol. 1, 46)

And those of the Stoic school – since, so far as their moral teaching went, they were admirable, as were also the poets in some particulars, on account of the seed of reason [the Logos] implanted in every race of men – were, we know, hated and put to death, – Heraclitus for instance, and, among those of our own time, Musonius and others. – (Apol. 2, 8)

For each man [i.e. various heathen writers – DP] spoke well in proportion to the share he had of the spermatic word, seeing what was related to it. But they who contradict themselves on the more important points appear not to have possessed the heavenly wisdom, and the knowledge which cannot be spoken against. Whatever things were rightly said among all men, are the property of us Christians. For next to God, we worship and love the Word who is from the unbegotten and ineffable God, since also He became man for our sakes, that becoming a partaker of our sufferings, He might also bring us healing. For all the writers were able to see realities darkly through the sowing of the implanted word that was in them. For the seed and imitation impacted according to capacity is one thing, and quite another is the thing itself, of which there is the participation and imitation according to the grace which is from Him. – (Apol. 2, 13)

It is evident that Justin regarded Socrates, Heraclitus and others as being spiritually regenerated and illuminated. He thought them to have had an inward possession of Christ and he therefore considered them as Christians. When he spoke of the “seed of reason” and the “implanted word” and the “spermatic word” and the “Word of whom every race of men were partakers,” he apparently meant more than the mere light of nature, because he referred to others who “appear not to have possessed the heavenly wisdom.”

Iranaeus is thought to have been born around 120 A.D. He supportively quoted Justin in his writings, and appears to have held a similar view on the present issue, as may be seen in the following quotes:

For to whomsoever the Lord shall say, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire,” these shall be damned for ever; and to whomsoever He shall say, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you for eternity, these do receive the kingdom for ever, and make constant advance in it; since there is one and the same God the Father, and His Word, who has been always present with the human race, by means indeed of various dispensations, and has wrought out many things, and saved from the beginning those who are saved, (for these are they who love God, and follow the Word of God according to the class to which they belong,) and has judged those who are judged, that is, those who forget God, and are blasphemous, and transgressors of His word. – (Book 4, 28.2)

For the Son is the knowledge of the Father; but the knowledge of the Son is in the Father, and has been revealed through the Son; and this was the reason why the Lord declared: “No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; nor the Father, save the Son, and those to whomsoever the Son shall reveal [Him]. For “shall reveal” was said not with reference to the future alone, as if then [only] the Word had begun to manifest the Father when He was born of Mary, but it applies indifferently throughout all time. For the Son, being present with His own handiwork from the beginning, reveals the Father to all; to whom He wills, and when He wills, and as the Father wills. Wherefore, then, in all things, and through all things, there is one God, the Father, and one Word, and one Son, and one Spirit, and one salvation to all who believe in Him. – (Book 4, 6.7)

For it was not merely for those who believed on Him in the time of Tiberius Caesar that Christ came, nor did the Father exercise His providence for the men only who are now alive, but for all men altogether, who from the beginning, according to their capacity, in their generation have both feared and loved God, and practised justice and piety towards their neighbours, and have earnestly desired to see Christ, and to hear His voice. Wherefore He shall, at His second coming, first rouse from their sleep all persons of this description, and shall raise them up, as well as the rest who shall be judged, and give them a place in His kingdom. For it is truly “one God who” directed the patriarchs towards His dispensations, and “has justified the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith.” For as in the first we were prefigured, so, on the other hand, are they represented in us, that is, in the Church, and receive the recompense for those things which they accomplished. – (Book 4, 22.2)

Hence, Iranaeus, like Justin, spoke of the Divine Word, or Son of God, “who has been always present with the human race, by means indeed of various dispensations... and saved from the beginning those who are saved... according to the class to which they belong... For the Son, being present with His own handiwork from the beginning, reveals the Father to all; to whom He wills, and when He wills, and as the Father wills... nor did the Father exercise His providence for

the men only who are now alive, but for all men altogether, who from the beginning, according to their capacity, in their generation have both feared and loved God...”

The epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus is thought to have been written around 130 A.D. It is an anonymous epistle. “Mathetes” merely means “a disciple.” While it offers no comment on the salvation of the unevangelized, it says things concerning the Divine Word which are in much accordance with the teachings of Justin:

I do not speak of things strange to me, nor do I aim at anything inconsistent with right reason; but having been a disciple of the Apostles, I am become a teacher of the Gentiles. I minister the things delivered to me to those that are disciples worthy of the truth. For who that is rightly taught and begotten by the loving Word, would not seek to learn accurately the things which have been clearly shown by the Word to His disciples, to whom the Word being manifested has revealed them, speaking plainly [to them], not understood indeed by the unbelieving, but conversing with the disciples, who, being esteemed faithful by Him, acquired a knowledge of the mysteries of the Father? – (Ch 11)

Observe that those who are first taught by the “loving Word” should thereafter “seek to learn accurately the things which have been clearly shown by the Word to His disciples.” This is the same idea conveyed by Justin.

Clement of Alexandria died around 215 A.D. The following quotes from him show that he also believed in salvation among the unevangelized:

It is He who also gave philosophy to the Greeks by means of the inferior angels. For by an ancient and divine order the angels are distributed among the nations. But the glory of those who believe is “the Lord’s portion.” For either the Lord does not care for all men; and this is the case either because He is unable (which is not to be thought, for it would be a proof of weakness), or because He is unwilling, which is not the attribute of a good being. And He who for our sakes assumed flesh capable of suffering, is far from being luxuriously indolent. Or He does care for all, which is befitting for Him who has become Lord of all. For He is Saviour; not [the Saviour] of some, and of others not. But in proportion to the adaptation possessed by each, He has dispensed His beneficence both to Greeks and Barbarians, even to those of them that were predestinated, and in due time called, the faithful and elect. Nor can He who called all equally, and assigned special honours to those who have believed in a specially excellent way, ever envy any. Nor can He who is the Lord of all, and serves above all the will of the good and almighty Father, ever be hindered by another... For the Son is the power of God, as being the Father’s most ancient Word before the production of all things, and His Wisdom. He is then properly called the Teacher of the beings formed by Him. – (Book 7, 2)

Further, Peter in the Acts says, “Of a truth, I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted by Him.” The absence of respect of persons in God is not then in time, but from eternity. Nor had His beneficence a beginning; nor any more is it limited to places or persons. For His beneficence is not confined to parts. “Open ye the gates of righteousness,” it is said; “entering into them, I will confess to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord. The righteous shall enter by it.” Explaining the prophet’s saying, Barnabas adds, “There being many gates open, that which is in righteousness is the gate which is in Christ, by which all who enter are blessed.” Bordering on the same meaning is also the following prophetic utterance: “The Lord is on many waters;” not the different covenants

alone, but the modes of teaching, those among the Greek and those among the Barbarians, conducing to righteousness. And already clearly David, bearing testimony to the truth, sings, "Let sinners be turned into Hades, and all the nations that forget God." They forget, plainly, Him whom they formerly remembered, and dismiss Him whom they knew previous to forgetting Him. There was then a dim knowledge of God also among the nations. – (Book 6, 8)

Clement spoke of God's beneficence being extended to all, yet confined it in another place to the "predestinated." This might be a contradiction, or it might be that by "all" he simply meant all nations, and he surely did mean at least this much.

I have quoted only the earliest Christian writers; however, similar statements can be found in subsequent centuries. I will summarize these by quoting a Roman Catholic writer, William Most, whose article was entitled, "Is There Salvation Outside the Church?" Though the Catholics err on many points, this only adds to the credibility of the following remarks because the Catholics certainly cannot be charged with any predisposition toward seeing salvation outside the church. They have contended as vehemently as any that there is no salvation outside their own ranks. They also consider early Christian literature to be generally authoritative and are very studious concerning it. Indeed, they place too much weight upon it. William Most observed that there are apparent contradictions in this literature, with some statements seeming to offer no possibility of salvation outside the church, while others, such as ones quoted earlier, tend to be very broad. Concerning this, he said:

A diligent search in the Fathers shows a similar situation in regard to "no salvation outside the Church." We find again two sets of assertions, very often by the same writers. One group of statements speaks very strongly, and almost stringently, about the need of membership; the other group softens this position by taking a remarkably broad view of what membership consists in.

What William Most said here of early Christian literature is true of all Christian literature, even Primitive Baptist writings. Certain statements can be construed to infer a position that all saved people will acquire evangelical faith in this life, yet other statements, by even the same writers, definitely show this was not intended. As a general rule, one cannot conclude where a man stood on this subject unless he *directly* addressed it. William Most then examined the statements of Justin Martyr and others concerning the internal revelation of the Logos and concluded:

So we seem to have found the much needed solution: Those who follow the Spirit of Christ, the Logos who writes the law on their hearts, are Christians, are members of Christ, are members of His Church. They may lack indeed external adherence; they may never have heard of the Church. But yet, in the substantial sense, without formal adherence, they do belong to Christ, to His Church.

Gill correctly said of these early Christians that they were more charitable toward heathen philosophers and poets than they deserved. The scriptures give almost no credibility to heathen religion and philosophy. Some modern "inclusivist" Christians greatly err in placing some acceptance in the false religions of the world, and some have gone so far as to say that these religions are potential means to salvation. The truth is that those who are saved in heathen societies have been saved *in spite of* these religions, not *because of* them. Paul warned the Athenian idolaters:

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. – Acts 17:30-31

Paul thus warned them against their false religion, and clearly implied that divine judgment awaits those who indulge in them, and I think this judgment will be far worse for those who have heard the truth yet still sanction such religious errors in themselves and others. The early Christians were mostly commenting on the times in which God “winked” at religious error because He had generally confined biblical instruction to the Jews. This is a very different thing from a religion that knowingly competes against the Son of God, Who is the only hope of man. Christ Himself said, “*He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him,*” (Jn 5:23). So whatever other religions may contribute toward the morality of man, they are vain insofar as their worship of God is concerned. They cannot honor God if they deny the Son. The early Christians were laboring to convert their heathen societies to Christianity, and countless numbers of them died in this endeavor. Whatever they said in defense of philosophers and poets was calculated to show the greatness of the Son and not the admissibility of religious alternatives. They may also be somewhat defended by the fact that Paul supportively quoted heathen poets on a few occasions (Acts 17:28, 1Cor 15:33, Tit 1:12), and he assigned the unknown god of Athens to the true God that made the world and all things therein (Acts 17:23).

Returning to the negative side, Justin and others also seem to have committed too far when naming specific heathens as Christians. Though I agree with them in the principle that God has children even in heathen cultures, salvation can be certainly known in an individual only when there is an outward profession of Christ or when the scriptures have specifically revealed it.

Gill dismissed many of these writers as referring only to the light of nature when speaking of illumination among the heathen; however, Gill does not seem so credible here. The above quotes are sufficient to show that more was actually intended.

As noted before, the theology and terminology of early Christians is not always clear and is sometimes disagreeable, yet if their proximity to the apostolic era confers them with any authority at all, one should think it would be on a point so basic as this, and it cannot be said with any degree of plausibility that the point had escaped their careful attention, because they were themselves taken from societies and families that had not been evangelized until recent memory. In many cases, their explanations were generally sound, and had a remarkable resemblance to the explanations offered by Primitive Baptists. They were generally careful not to teach salvation outside of Christ, or to divorce salvation from faith and a knowledge of Christ, but they did not believe all saved individuals would attain a knowledge so thorough as those who hear the preached word.

English Baptists on the Extent of Evangelism

English Baptists seem to have said very little to directly address this subject, and as I have said before, unless a man has directly addressed the issue, it is difficult to infer where he stood concerning it. They did speak against those Arminians of their times who advanced the erroneous notion that the heathen can be saved by following whatever light they have. They also

criticized the idea that unbelievers in evangelized societies are saved, and this was especially leveled against the claim that some unbelievers were saved because they had been baptized in their infancy. However, they do not appear to have said much more than this. One exception was John Gill who did occasionally speak about it. Most of this section will consider what he wrote. He is often considered as holding the view that all elect will be evangelized. In this section, I will show this is not altogether true. Though he certainly believed the elect would be evangelized as a general rule, he did not apply this universally. I will also offer some comments on the 1689 London Confession and what it suggests concerning this issue.

Gill sometimes seemed to eliminate almost all possibility of salvation beyond the hearing of the preached word, but these statements must be understood within the whole of what he wrote. Consideration must also be given to the evidence that he modified his views on some things over the course of life. None of his writings appear to have a stronger tendency toward a universal evangelism view than Cause of God and Truth, as may be seen from the following quote:

It will not be denied that God may make use of extraordinary means; send an angel from heaven to acquaint men with the way of salvation by Jesus Christ, or by some other secret method, unknown to us; yet from the possibility of things to the certainty of them, we cannot argue... – (p 211)

Hence, this suggests that he considered exceptional cases to be as rare as angelic appearances, and even these cases were taken as ordinary in the sense that they have the gospel being preached to the natural ear. But he either retreated from this view in his later writings, or else the words “some other secret method, unknown to us” had a greater relevance to him than the above statement would suggest.

In his commentary, when considering 1Thes 2:16, which speaks of Jews “*Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles, that they might be saved,*” Gill said:

Speaking or preaching the Gospel is the ordinary means of saving souls, or of acquainting them with the way of salvation, the necessity of it, and of the application of it to them, and with this end and view it is preached...

This text obviously presents a difficulty to the idea that all elect hear preachers. It is interesting that Gill did not argue that these Gentiles heard preachers at a later date. While this is clearly a possibility, yet, as Gill said before, “from the possibility of things to the certainty of them, we cannot argue.” Instead, Gill adapted this case by appealing to “extraordinary means,” and it is no longer clear that he considered the exceptional cases to be as rare as angelic appearances.

Another pertinent place in his commentary occurs at Mt 23:13 where the Lord said of the Pharisees, “*...for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men...*” Concerning this Gill said:

...not eternal life and happiness, the entrance into which can neither be opened nor shut by men: those whom God determines to bring thither, shall have an entrance abundantly ministered to them, in spite of the opposition of men and devils; though these men did all that in them lay, to hinder persons enjoying everlasting glory. But the Gospel dispensation is here meant... they shut up the Scriptures, took away the key of knowledge, and laid it aside; and darkened the Scriptures

by their false glosses, and obliged the people to observe the traditions of the elders... by which men were shut up, and kept from the true knowledge both of law and Gospel...

Gill's meaning here is further elucidated by his comments on the 37th verse where Christ said, "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!*" Concerning which Gill said:

Our Lord is to be understood not of his divine will, as God, to gather the people of the Jews internally, by his Spirit and grace, to himself; for all those whom Christ would gather, in this sense, were gathered, notwithstanding all the opposition made by the rulers of the people; but of his human affection and will, as a man, and a minister, to gather them to him externally, by, and under the ministry of his word, to hear him preach; so as that they might be brought to a conviction of, and an assent unto him as the Messiah; which, though it might fall short of faith in him, would have been sufficient to have preserved them from temporal ruin, threatened to their city and temple, in the following verse... And it is to be observed, that the persons whom Christ would have gathered, are not represented as being unwilling to be gathered; but their rulers were not willing that they should, and be made proselytes to him, and come under his wings. It is not said, *how often would I have gathered you, and you would not!* nor, *I would have gathered Jerusalem, and she would not;* nor, *I would have gathered thy children, and they would not;* but, *how often would I have gathered thy children, and ye would not!* Which observation alone is sufficient to destroy the argument founded on this passage in favour of free will... The opposition and resistance to the will of Christ were not made by the people, but by their governors. The common people seemed inclined to attend his ministry, as appears from the vast crowds, which, at different times and places, followed him; but the chief priests, and rulers, did all they could to hinder the collection of them to him, and their belief in him as the Messiah; by traducing his character, miracles, and doctrines, and by menacing the people with curses, and excommunications, making a law, that whoever confessed him should be turned out of the synagogue. So that the plain meaning of the text is the same with that of Mt 23:13 and consequently is no proof of men's resisting the operations of the Spirit and grace of God; but only shows what obstructions and discouragements were thrown in the way of attendance on the external ministry of the word.

As for those "children" who were not gathered, Gill qualified his opinion of them by saying that had Christ preached to them without opposition from the Jewish leadership, "though it might fall short of faith in him, would have been sufficient to have preserved them from temporal ruin." However, the balance of what he said clearly shows he was disposed toward the idea that these "children" were the elect of God who were not gathered in a gospel sense. He made a distinction between being called *internally* and *externally*, and clearly implied that the former could happen without the latter. He made great emphasis of the fact that Christ did not express a desire to gather Jerusalem in general, but to gather "thy children," which Gill took to mean the elect children within Jerusalem; hence, it follows that in some sense elect children had not been gathered. As to this sense, Gill said it was not "to gather the people of the Jews internally, by his Spirit and grace;" rather it was "to gather them to him externally, by, and under the ministry of his word, to hear him preach." He offered further comment on the character of these children who were not gathered when he said, "The opposition and resistance to the will of Christ were not made by the people, but by their governors. The common people seemed inclined to attend his ministry..."

Gill was probably right to make a distinction between the common people among the Jews, who heard Christ gladly (Mk 12:37), and the wicked rulers who opposed Him and His followers at every step. The natural tendency of any society is for its positions of leadership and influence to be occupied by unregenerate men. *“For the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light,”* (Lk 16:8). And Paul said, *“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called,”* (1Cor 1:26). Accordingly, as one examines people of influence in America today, such as among actors, athletes, academicians, judges and politicians, there appears to be much unregeneracy, as evidenced by their constant opposition to God and His word. This is what one would naturally expect of Satan in his attempts to corrupt societies, because there is no better way to do this than by placing wicked men in positions of influence and authority. The church is always in battle against this, at some times prevailing more than at others, but always praying *“For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty,”* (1Tim 2:2).

Divine intervention can of course offset or even prevent such wickedness in high places, but this seems to be a special grace, and it is never exerted to such degree that His children cease to say, *“Even so, come, Lord Jesus,”* (Rev 22:20). Such grace is also withdrawn from some societies as they tend in rebellious directions, and this accelerates their decline. Hence, the Lord threatened rebellious Israel, saying that He would take away *“...the mighty man, and the man of war, the judge, and the prophet, and the prudent, and the ancient. The captain of fifty, and the honourable man, and the counsellor, and the cunning artificer, and the eloquent orator. And I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them,”* (Is 3:1-4). Elsewhere it was said, *“For the leaders of this people cause them to err; and they that are led of them are destroyed,”* (Is 9:16). It was to the same class of men that Christ said, *“...for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.”* And such men were surely included when He said, *“ye shall die in your sins”* (Jn 8:24), and *“Ye are from beneath; I am from above”* (Jn 8:23), and *“Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?”* (Mt 23:33).

It would be utterly naive to suppose that such influences are of no consequence upon the spread of the truth and the degree of its acceptance. Observation and scripture clearly show otherwise. Paul said of the wicked Jews, *“Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved...”* (1Thes 2:15-16). So it is undeniable that such oppositions have some success in preventing the progress of the preached word. Wicked influences in high places are also successful to some degree in blinding the eyes of those who would have otherwise fully received the word. To what extent this may occur in the elect is not clear. The scriptures are purposefully ambiguous on the point. But the fact that it can occur to a significant degree can be seen in the complacency of the Laodicean church (Rev 3:14-22). The Lord charged this church with saying of itself, *“I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing,”* yet the Lord added, *“and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked”* (vs 17), and He further said, *“I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou*

mayest see,” (vs 18). It is most evident that the spiritual vision of this church was obscured by worldly influences, and that it was therefore in need of “eyesalve” to rectify its blindness.

However, these oppositions can never hinder the Holy Spirit in His *internal* calling. This is an important point emphasized by Gill. Yet he acknowledged that such oppositions can hinder *external* calling. Thus, these two callings do not always go together, and Gill confirmed that such was his opinion in Body of Divinity where he said in his chapter on effectual calling:

And besides this, there is a more special and particular call of men, and not so general, and is either external or internal: the *external* call is by the ministry of the word; by the ministry of the prophets under the Old Testament; and of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, and of Christ himself in human nature, and of his apostles under the New; and of all succeeding ministers in all ages. The *internal* call is by the Spirit and grace of God to the hearts and consciences of men; these two sometimes go together, but not always; some are externally called, and not internally called; and of those that are internally called, some are called by and through the ministry of the word, and some without it; though, for the most part, men are called by it; and because it is usually so, and this external call is a matter of moment and importance, it is necessary to be a little more large and explicit upon it.

Further light is shed on Gill’s views by his comments on Rom 10:14, “...*how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?*” –

This is to be understood of outward hearing of the word, and of adult persons only; for that, infants may have the grace of regeneration, and so faith wrought in them by the Spirit of God, without hearing the word, is not to be denied; since as they are capable of the principles of corruption, why not of grace? and also of such persons as have the right and free exercise of the faculties of hearing and speaking, and not of such who never could hear, and speak; for as the Spirit works where, and how he pleases, so he can work faith in the hearts of such persons who never heard the word, and enable them to exercise it on the proper object, and cause them secretly to call upon the name of the Lord, with groans which cannot be uttered. Moreover, this is to be, understood of the ordinary way and means of believing; for though God can, and sometimes does work by other means, and even without any, yet his usual way and method is, to bring men to faith and repentance by the hearing of the word...

These quotes show that Gill did not hold absolutely to a position that all elect will be evangelized. It is highly unlikely that all other Baptists in his times held a contrary view. Gill made some statements, when writing in general terms, which might be misconstrued as affirming that all elect will hear the preached word, but he was merely using the common practice of stating a general rule in absolute terms. Hence, a man might say that “automobiles use gasoline,” as though this were an absolute rule, yet he intends it only as a general rule, and does not intend to deny the fact that some automobiles use diesel.

The 1689 London Baptist Confession also offered some comment on this subject. In its chapter on effectual calling it stated:

10.3 Elect infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit; who worketh when, and where, and how he pleases; so also are all elect persons, who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.

The theologian W.G.T. Shedd said of the corresponding statement in the Westminster Confession, “This is commonly understood to refer not merely, or mainly, to idiots and insane persons, but to such of the pagan world as God pleases to regenerate without the use of the written revelation,” (p 707- 708). Since the Baptists did not change a single word of this article, it is unlikely that they intended anything different by it than the Westminster.

Shedd then offered further comments which he connected to another article of the Westminster Confession:

The passage, “In every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with him,” Acts 10:35, is often explained as teaching that there are in every nation some who live virtuous and exemplary lives, and upon this ground obtain the rewards and blessedness of the future. This would be salvation by works, which is impossible, according to St. Paul... This is an imaginary case of perfect obedience. There is no such man. It is with reference to such an interpretation of this text, that the Westminster Confession (X. 4) asserts, that “men not professing the Christian religion cannot be saved in any other way whatever, be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature and the law of that religion which they do profess,” because their “diligence” is a *failure*. The Thirty-nine Articles assert that no man, either in Christendom or Heathendom, can be saved by his morality and virtue... In the passage, above cited, the phrase “fearer of God,” and “worker of righteousness,” is employed *technically*, by St. Peter, to denote *a man inquiring after the way of salvation*: somewhat as it was among the Jews, to signify a proselyte of the gate. Guericke: Church History, p. 29. This is evident from the fact, that to this “devout” Cornelius who “feared God with all his house,” Acts 10:2, the apostle preached Christ as the *Saviour of sinners*, “through whose name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins,” and that Cornelius believed, and was baptized. Acts 10:36-48. He would not have done this, had he expected that his “fearing God” and “working righteousness,” in other words his own morality and virtue, would save him.

Shedd’s comments about article 10.4 of the Westminster Confession would be at least as applicable to the 1689 Baptist Confession. As before noted, the latter was derived from the former, and for the most part, the Baptists accepted the Westminster language without modification. This has led some to question the Baptist Confession, fearing vestiges of Protestantism not accurately reflecting Baptist beliefs. But this complaint could hardly be applicable to those parts the Baptists modified. It stands to reason that these modifications are some of the most telling parts of the Confession. Now compare the corresponding articles:

Westminster – 10.4 Others, not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, and may have some common operations of the Spirit, yet they never truly come to Christ, and therefore can not be saved: much less can men, not professing the Christian religion, be saved in any other way whatsoever, be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature, and the law of that religion they do profess; and to assert and maintain that they may be saved without warrant of the Word of God.

Baptist – 10.4 Others not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, and may have some common operations of the Spirit, yet not being effectually drawn by the Father, they neither will nor can truly come to Christ, and therefore cannot be saved: much less can men that receive not the Christian religion be saved; be they never so diligent to frame their lives

according to the light of nature and the law of that religion they do profess.

Observe how the Baptists changed the words “not professing the Christian religion” to “receive not the Christian religion.” They apparently found the words of the Westminster too restrictive, and changed them in such a way that would seem to imply *rejecters* of Christian religion as opposed to those whose absence of “profession” is owing to naive ignorance. The suggestion is therefore that they did not believe in the universal damnation of the latter, or at least they did not wish to make a commitment on the subject.

Primitive Baptists on the Extent of Evangelism

In this section I will present evidence that Primitive Baptists have never approved the view that all elect will be evangelized. Nor did they believe this about all mentally competent elect. There were differences among these Primitive Baptists as to whether such elect are numerous or few, but the idea of universal damnation in the unevangelized world was practically nonexistent. One can find certain isolated statements by Primitive Baptists of the past that may indicate otherwise, but when the whole of their writings are considered, and the meanings of their terms are carefully ascertained, it will nearly always become evident that their position was as I have represented it to be. The following quote illustrates the necessity of considering the whole of what they said before drawing conclusions about them. This quote is from James Oliphant, a man having a very important role in Primitive Baptist history:

The great Savior came into the world to carry out that will of God, and all thus given him shall come to him, believe on him and attain eternal life. – (The Doctrine of the Final Perseverance of the Saints, ch 6, p 50, 1878)

This statement is true in the sense in which Oliphant intended it, but it potentially conveys the errant impression that Oliphant believed all elect would be evangelized. I will present quotes later definitely showing this was not the case. This statement further demonstrates that one can seldom know the views of a man on this subject unless he *directly* addressed it. The same could be seen in what I have quoted from John Gill. Men oftentimes speak in absolute terms when describing what they think to be ordinary rules or when describing the experience of their audience. Such statements can be easily misconstrued as asserting unintended absolutes.

It is very clear that Primitive Baptists have always been averse to the idea of human means in eternal salvation. The historical record is so clear on this that few would presume to challenge it. Now it is a rare mixture that denies human means while affirming the universal evangelization of the elect. Those who believe the former are not bound to believe the latter, and those who believe the latter are nearly always motivated in part by the fact that their denial of the former left them with no recourse. Therefore, when Primitive Baptists of the past spoke against human means, I am confident they were also implicitly objecting to the idea that all elect will be evangelized, and that I could therefore justifiably adduce this evidence to support my claim. Notwithstanding, for the avoidance of doubt, I have dispensed with scores of quotes to this effect, and have confined myself to quotes that directly address the matter. Even these quotes are numerous, and date back to the times that Primitive Baptists formally rejected the means position of the missionaries. It is also clear that their view was held with sufficient conviction that if

others had opposed it, then a notable controversy would have resulted, yet I have never found any significant controversy on the subject.

The first few quotes are especially significant. These come from Samuel Trott (1783-1866) and Gilbert Beebe (1800-1881). Both men were signers of the Black Rock Address of 1832. This was a critical document wherein Primitive Baptists resolved to take a stand in the Mission/Fullerite controversy. Trott was the primary author of the document. Beebe was editor of "Signs of the Times," a major Primitive Baptist periodical in those days. These men both professed a belief in the absolute predestination of all things and frequently wrote about it. Primitive Baptists of today commonly refer to such persons as "Absoluters." While some Absoluters hold views that Primitive Baptists reject, Beebe and Trott were generally respected by the Primitive Baptists of those times. The reasons for this will become apparent when I explain in a later section what these men actually believed concerning predestination. For present purposes, the fact these men were Absoluters proves very useful, because if it can be shown that not even the earliest Absoluters believed in the universal evangelization of the elect, then there is little hope of finding such a doctrine among Primitive Baptists with more moderate views on predestination. In the first of these quotes, Trott replied to New School Baptists (i.e. Fullerite or Arminian Baptists) who alleged that the eternal destinies of men were suspended upon their money and effort:

In what other light can we view you as that of unfeeling monsters, if you believe that God has suspended the salvation of the heathen on your giving money to provide them with preaching, and can content yourself with giving so sparingly? And in what light are we to view the mission agents who believe the above position relative to the situation of the heathen (if we can credit their own repeated assertions), and yet who can appropriate so large a proportion of the money so sparingly given to rescue these people from dropping into the quenchless flames of hell, paying themselves those high salaries every year, and to decking themselves with gold watches, guards, spectacles, &c. – ("Missionary Priestcraft," Signs., vol 5, 1837)

This quote shows that Trott rejected the notion of human means in salvation, and it strongly suggests he did not believe in the universal damnation of the unevangelized. The next quote is in much the same spirit. It is very lengthy, but I have included it for the careful consideration of any Arminian reader:

A few remarks in reference to the system of the missionaries. They bring these texts to sustain them in their notion of being *co-workers with God*, yea, they go so far as to say that God *cannot save sinners without the aid of preachers*. Admitting this to be the fact, and the conclusion is irresistible, that God has never in earnest purposed the salvation of sinners, notwithstanding His having given His Son to save them, but that He looks on it with an entire indifference, whether they get to heaven or sink to hell. Let us just take one heathen, in a land where the gospel is not now preached, and count some of the leading contingencies that stand in the way of his salvation, according to the missionaries' notions. A missionary must be sent to him, to obtain this to go back no further: 1st, a young man must consent to become religious; 2nd, he must devote himself to the ministry; 3rd, schools must be established where he can obtain the necessary qualifications; 4th, he being a poor pious young man, beggars must go forth and succeed in obtaining money to defray the expenses of his education, and the ladies must become sufficiently interested in his education to furnish him with clothing; 5th, when all this is done, he must decide on going to the heathen instead of seeking a call in some other field; 6th, he must find a wife willing to go with

him; 7th, on application to the Board he must be judged to be of the right stamp; 8th, the public must be induced to contribute money enough to sustain the other establishments, &c., and to enable the Board to furnish him his outfit, &c.; 9th, the winds and waves and skill of the mariners must contribute to waft him in safety to his intended port; 10th, he must not get sick of his undertaking, and therefore invent an excuse to return, as some have; 11th, after this, if the natives neither conclude to eat him, being cannibals, nor drive him from them, he may become settled as a missionary among them; 12th, if he lives long enough he may acquire a knowledge of the language so as to write and circulate tracts among them, and preach, &c. Now to the individual heathen whose salvation we started for, and 13th, he must not have died during this long space whilst the missionary was being prepared; 14th, he must fall in with the missionaries' tracts or preaching; 15th, he must be convinced by the missionaries' arguments of the truth of the Christian religion; 16th, he must have resolution sufficient to profess that religion and then, 17th, if he hold out in his profession, he will, according to the mission notion of conversion, get to heaven. Here then are 17 contingencies, besides chains of others connected with each, standing between this man and heaven; should any one of them fail to take place, all would fail, and neither the zeal of the missionary, nor the labors of the theological professors, nor the money collected and expended, nor the shed-blood of Christ would save this individual from the quenchless fire of hell. Can any man whose judgment is not perverted by religious frenzy, believe that a God infinite in knowledge, wisdom and power, could will the salvation of sinners and yet leave their salvation to depend on the uncertain issue of such a mass of contingencies? Can anything more absurd be found ascribed by the heathen to their gods than the missionaries thus ascribe to their god, in representing Him as willing, and attempting the salvation of sinners through the sacrifice of His own Son, and yet leaving their salvation to depend altogether on such a combination of human contingencies? Well do the missionaries term their god, *the God of missions*, and not ascribe to Him the title claimed for our God, namely: THE GOD OF OUR SALVATION. – (“Laborers Together With God,” Signs., vol 9, 1841)

Unfortunately, the absurdities exposed by Trott still abound in the religious world. If the Arminian were to admit that God made arrangements for the 17 contingencies here named, he would have to acknowledge that God does not make such arrangements for all men in general. So he would be admitting that God performed an act of *election* and *predestination* for the named heathen, and an act of *preterition* (i.e. “passing by”) against others. These are conclusions the Arminian adamantly opposes. But if he denies them, he is then confronted with the reasoning of Trott. So his foot strikes a prick either way he chooses to kick. While any Calvinist would be grateful to Trott for the point he so forcefully made, it does not seem that Trott concurred with those who say all elect will hear preachers. It is unlikely that his views on this subject differed from those of his close friend Gilbert Beebe, who spoke with complete clarity concerning it:

To obviate the difficulty involved in the doctrine of salvation by works, which would consign all infants, idiots and heathen to irremediable perdition, the arminians of every nominal distinction have generally been driven to contend for two distinct systems of salvation; the one of works, adapted to the case of enlightened adults; and the other without either works or regeneration, and confined to infants. And although the scriptures of truth positively declare but one way of salvation, and that there is no other way or name given under heaven or among men, whereby we must be saved, they find it much more convenient to make God a liar, and presumably proclaim another way, than to abandon their darling heresy, and subscribe to what God has revealed on this subject... Such absurdities abound in all the doctrines of the arminians, whether of the Baptist or other names... The quickening power of God is as efficient in the cases of infants, idiots, savages and heathen men, as in the case of the most profoundly learned and religiously educated of

mankind... How great a number of infants, idiots &c., are embraced in the election of God, is not for us to know, whether all or a part... – (“Reply to Brother Funston’s Letter,” Signs., June 1, 1842).

Observe that Beebe placed the case of heathen along with infants and idiots. The obvious commonality is that none of these are evangelized. Beebe clearly did not believe in the universal damnation of the heathen; therefore, he did not believe all elect would be evangelized, though he wisely advised against speculations on the frequency of such cases in practice. Observe that the absurdities Beebe attributed to Arminians apply equally well to those Calvinists who insist upon human means in salvation, and indeed, Beebe considered such Calvinists to be Arminians. Again, Beebe wrote at a later date:

And in connection with our text Christ said, “Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein” – Mark x. 15... Then instead of infants being debarred from salvation because they are infants, and unable to do anything to procure salvation, all adults, in order to be saved, must become as little children... Now we ask, Is not this method of salvation alone by grace, perfectly adapted to all the redeemed family of God, whether infant or adults? The tall, the wise, the noble and the mighty men of this world, are quite as helpless and dependent for their salvation as the infant, the heathen, or the idiot. What other doctrine except that held by the old fashioned Baptists ... presents any hope for the helpless, the lost and the ruined of mankind? – (“Mark X. 14; Luke XVIII. 16,” Signs., Jan 15, 1857)

While Beebe and Trott affirmed the predestination of all things, they correctly understood this did not imply that a universal evangelization of the elect was one of the things God had predestined. Beebe and Trott were perhaps the most honored preachers among the old Absoluters. It is naive to suppose that the sentiments expressed above were unique. And as noted before, if not even the early Absoluters believed that all elect were predestined to hear preachers, then it is highly improbable that such a view had any prevalence among other Primitive Baptists. This is confirmed by the following quotes. The first of these is from Gideon Potter (1798-1894):

The first time I ever attended White River Association was in the fall of 1831... There was a trouble in the Association in regard to the reception of alien baptism in Vernal Church. This difficulty resulted in dropping connection with that church. The churches here had been tried sorely with the doctrine of A. Campbell, and in some churches there had been division, and there was much prejudice in this country on that subject when I came here. It was very common then for some one to criticize my preaching as soon as it was done. Campbell’s followers were ever ready to raise objection to our preaching... Their views of the design of baptism were such that no person could be saved without it, so Mr. Campbell taught. I knew that if this were true, that there was no salvation to heathens, nor to persons who had been sprinkled. They taught that men must not only be immersed, but that they must be immersed with an intelligent understanding that it was indispensable to salvation; hence their views virtually denied that immersed persons were saved, unless they were immersed with their views of its design. I saw that this view of the subject necessitated its advocates to deny that any person can be saved unless he be immersed with their views of immersion. It also made it necessary for them to deny salvation to heathens or persons outside of Bible teaching. To avoid this consequence, they were compelled to allow that there were two plans of salvation, one suited to the infants, heathens, etc., the other to the people under Bible teaching. This view was very repulsive to me, and very far from what I had understood the Bible to teach. I noticed, too, that it was suited to catch the masses. It made the

new birth an easy thing. "Being born again" was an easy affair. Evangelical faith had no more significance than our opinions respecting other things. – ("Autobiography")

I have included much of the surrounding text in this quote to set the context for some of what follows. The Primitive Baptists of the early 19th century were being opposed not only by New School Baptists but also by the Campbellite Baptists, later known as the "Church of Christ." These held to the view of baptismal regeneration, though it could be more properly said that they denied regeneration altogether. They denied any form of inward illumination or revelation by the Holy Spirit, and made the gospel to be nothing more than an appeal to the natural mind. They held that God only communicates to people via the written word; consequently, they imagined God to have less power than the Devil, because the Devil needed neither a book nor a preacher to put it in the heart of Judas to betray Christ (Jn 13:2), nor does he need a book or preacher to seduce other men. Because of these heresies, the old Primitive Baptists wrote much concerning the workings of the Holy Spirit and the true nature of faith. I will present some of this later.

Sylvester Hassell said of W.M. Mitchel (1819-1901), "The Primitive Baptists have no more esteemed minister or writer in the United States than Elder Mitchel," (History., p 885). Mitchel's views on the present subject were:

Popular as this system is, and sustained by all the logic that a powerful and learned ministry can bring to bear, its effects in reaching the little infant, the idiot, and the untutored savage are so apparent to every thinking mind that various other plans have been thought necessary to reach the condition of these classes. It is well known that infants, idiots, maniacs and untutored heathen die as well as the "wise and prudent" of the world, and as they are totally incapable of understanding or complying with the terms or conditions of salvation, some other method must be invented, or it must be given up that there is no possible salvation for them. In order to evade this very unpopular, as well as absurd conclusion, some have contended that little infants are not sinners, and consequently are saved on that ground." – (Signs., 1870)

James Oliphant (1846-1925) had perhaps one of the sharpest minds ever among the Primitive Baptists. He was one of the leading authors of the Fulton Confession of 1900. His views can be clearly seen in:

The idea that the written word is the means of the eternal salvation of men will lead to the idea that the heathen are lost for the want of it; lost for want of human effort. It promotes trust in men and money, while these sentiments from which we plead promote a reliance on the Lord. – (Autobiography, p 44).

As already shown, Christian literature from the first few centuries after the Apostles demonstrates a belief in salvation among the unevangelized. Oliphant was familiar with this literature and commented on it in saying:

Clements and others of the fathers believed that God from time to time raised up among the heathen great moral heroes who were a great blessing to them, and who maintained exalted ideas of God and the duty of men to each other and to God. They held that God was so among the heathens as to justify the opinion that they are blest with salvation as other nations are. It is true that deep, dense ignorance prevails in many parts of heathendom, but the same is lamentably true

in many parts of Christendom. How little do the masses in our own land know of the Bible. Consider the condition of things in Christianity from the rise of Popery to the end of the persecution. We find ignorance deep and dark in the history of Christianity, as well as in heathenism. It is certainly delightful to regard the reign of grace as operative in every nation. It is a liberal view and reasonable. Peter, at the house of Cornelius, said, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." Doubtless Peter believed that such people could be found in every land, and this was the opinion of Clements and many of the fathers. – ("Primitive Monitor," June 1906)

In his Autobiography, Oliphant spoke of meeting Gregg Thompson, son of the well-known Wilson Thompson, in the fall of 1870. Oliphant related how that he heard Thompson powerfully preach on "*My doctrine shall drop as the rain...*" (Dt 32:2). In summarizing this sermon, Oliphant said:

Although it is now forty-two years ago, I remember much of what he said. The rain and operations of grace are not to be directed and controlled by men... "The wind bloweth where it listeth," so the Lord works where and when He pleases. The rain and the dew fall on heathen lands, and the wind blows there, and the rain of grace is equally sovereign... I rejoiced to know that God alone is the Savior and that the rain and blessings of grace are entirely independent of men. Capitalists can form a corner on many things, but not on the rain, or dew, or wind. So the Lord is able to save in all the earth. – (p 16)

So it appears Gregg Thompson did not believe all elect would be evangelized, and I think this offers some comment on where Wilson Thompson, his famous father, stood as well.

Sylvester Hassell (1842-1928) is as well known as any Primitive Baptist. His outstanding work entitled Church History is well-respected even by those who are not Primitive Baptists. He was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of North Carolina for this work and other deeds. Hassell drew up some articles of faith to be used for his own widely-distributed periodical. One of these articles stated:

For the manifestation of His glory, God, before the foundation of the world, predestinated some men and angels to eternal life, through Jesus Christ, to the praise of His glorious grace, and left others to act in their sins to their just condemnation, to the praise of His glorious justice. The Father gave all the elect of the human family to the Son in the eternal covenant of grace; the Son, according to the prophecies and types of four thousand years, became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and died and rose again to redeem and justify the elect; and the Holy Ghost regenerates the elect, creating in their souls a new spiritual life, and effectually applies to them the holy and everlasting salvation of Jesus, giving them, generally though not always, under the administration of the word and the ordinances of God, true repentance and faith and hope and love, and working in them both to will and to do of His own good pleasure, and infallibly keeping every one of them unto the fullness of salvation which is to be finally revealed to them; and this eternal salvation is for the elect only, and is personal and unconditional on their part, God by His Spirit working in them all the so-called spiritual conditions of repentance, faith, and love, so that the salvation of the elect is all of Divine and unmerited grace and for it God deserves and will receive all the glory, and all who die in infancy are among the elect, and are saved by God's almighty grace. – ("Articles of Faith," The Gospel Messenger, Jan 1901)

Sylvester Hassell stated here the opinion that adult elect “generally but not always” come under “the administration of the word and the ordinances.” However, I will shortly quote a contemporary named John Oliphant who expressed the possibility that most elect will never have the true gospel nor even a Bible. Such variations of opinion are inevitable; however, these men were obviously in agreement on the principle that not all elect will be evangelized.

The following is a question addressed to Sylvester Hassell followed by his answer:

Q. Will any persons be saved unless the gospel is preached to them?

A. While it is true that the ministry is to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, as the Spirit of God may direct them, and as the providence of God may open the way to them, and it is the duty of other members to help them on their way after a godly sort, and those to whom they minister in spiritual things should minister to them in carnal things, as the Scripture teach, it is at the same time true that all the elect and redeemed people of God, both infants and adults, will be saved. (Psalm 33:12; Isa. 35:10; 45:17; 53:11; Jer. 31-34; Matt. 1:21; 11:25-27; 16:16,17; John 5:25; 6:37-40; 10:27-30; 17:1-3, 24; Rom. 8:28-39; I Cor. 1:26-31; 12:3; Eph. 1:1-14; I Pet. 1-5; Rev. 5:9,10). Jesus is the Great Preacher, and, by His omnipresent Spirit, He preaches His gospel savingly to His people (Isa. 61:1-3,10,11; Luke 4:16-30; Heb. 2:11,12; Psalm 110:3). – (Questions and Answers)

Those who criticize Primitive Baptists for their stand against mission societies should carefully consider Hassell’s answer. He probably wrote as much as anyone in defense of the Primitive Baptist position on this subject, yet it is clear he felt evangelism is important duty. The position taken by Hassell and other historical Primitive Baptists was that evangelism, though a good thing, is like all good things in that it must be done in the right way and for the right reasons.

H.M. Curry (1860-?) was a strong predestinarian, and I suspect the Absoluter school lays claim to him. He wrote an excellent satire entitled “A Dream Tour Through Arminian Heaven.” He described his imaginary tour through heaven as it would be if Arminianism were true, and he was there searching for someone giving praise to Christ. As he went from place to place, he was always frustrated in his quest. For example, he first encountered a group of children, and upon asking them about Jesus Christ, their reply was they had not much use for Him, because they had been fortunate to die as infants, while in a state of purity, and had no need of Him. In this Curry was ridiculing the Arminian denial of original sin. He then described coming to a shrine at the top of a hill where many people were doing obeisance to a small coin. They claimed it was the first penny ever contributed toward their salvation. These seemed to honor the coin more than Jesus Christ. So he continued in his quest, whereupon his next encounter was described:

I next came upon a great company composed of people of all nations. They were full of zeal and enthusiasm. I at once recognized that it was the missionary harvest from the foreign fields. Foremost in the throngs were the Burmese, displaying banners with Judson’s name emblazoned in flaming colors. After these came Hawaiians, Hindoos, Fijians, Persians, Japanese, with now and then a straggling Chinaman; none of the last named however had died in America. High over all floated a prodigious flag bearing the inscription, written in all languages, “Long live the American Board of Foreign Missions.” Upon inquiry I found that this company embraced all who had ever reached heaven from heathen lands, except the small number worshipping in the little temple on top of the hill, before referred to. I also found out from an old resident that their

arrival there is of quite recent date, not a single arrival dating further back than the beginning of mission work. Before this human machinery was put in operation, the countless number of men and women dying in heathen lands, all sank down into irretrievable destruction. There was no remedy for them. No preacher, consequently no salvation; no priest, consequently no Christ. I once more inquired concerning Jesus the Savior of sinners. They only laughed, and said he was entitled to no praise from them, for he had done no more for them than he had for their ancestors and brethren who were now perishing in the perdition of the ungodly. They protested that they owed their salvation alone to the mission work, in carrying salvation within their reach, and their own good judgment in appropriating it to their own advantage; they said that Christ alone had benefited them nothing.

After hearing this I stood for some time sick at heart. I was here a lonely wanderer. O how I longed to return to earth again. There I had the fellowship and communion of saints; here I was a wretched outcast; no fellow, no companions, none to join with me in ascribing praise to God; even the Savior himself could not be found there.

I will offer the remaining quotes without comment. All were from outstanding men and able preachers:

John T. Oliphant (1841-?):

The Word in essence is not an inseparable part of the Gospel, as many think and teach. They are often had separately. All 'born again' have in them the Word in essence – Christ and His graces – while most of them likely have not, and never did have the true Gospel, nor even a Bible. – (John T. Oliphant, The Inheritance of the Heirs of God, p 85, 1924)

Lemuel Potter (1841-1897):

One question I want settled. When the Savior said, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me;" I want to know if they will absolutely come... His [i.e. Mr. Throgmorton's] doctrine is, that they will not be brought at all unless the Gospel be sent there. My doctrine is that they will be brought whether the Gospel gets there or not. – (Throgmorton-Potter Debate, p 234, 1887)

J.H. Fisher (1860-?):

The heathen are lost without Christ, but not lost because they never heard or saw a human preacher. – ("My Reasons for Leaving the New School Baptists," ch 17, p 52, 1896)

S.A. Paine (1874-1910):

The system that says the Spirit cannot save without the preacher, makes the preacher the Saviour and the Spirit the means; or else the Holy Spirit is making poor progress or use of the means, inasmuch as large majority of the family of Adam have never heard the gospel, and a majority of those who have are not saved by it. How long, Oh Lord, before thy people will make the good confession Jonah made: "Salvation is of the Lord." – (Writings of S.A. Paine, p 25)

John R. Daily (1854-?):

Then there were children of God that did not belong to the Jewish nation – but the Gospel had not been preached to others. Then God had a people among the Gentiles. – (A Theological Discussion on the Plan of Salvation,” p 55-56, 1912)

While these quotes should make it evident as to where Primitive Baptists have historically stood on this issue, what might not be evident to the reader is the vast body of literature that had to be examined in order to find these quotes. My reason for making this point is that it is important for theology to be both correct in principle and balanced in emphasis. A man may be right in principle but be wrong in emphasis. He may “*strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel*,” (Mt 23:24). Historical Primitive Baptists were both correct in principle and correct in emphasis. They correctly taught the principle that God saves apart from evangelism, but they did not emphasize this point in such a way as to obscure the fact that our duty is to preach and teach the gospel of Jesus Christ to the fullest of our ability, nor did they obscure the fact that an individual cannot have assurance of salvation unless they have heard, believed and obeyed the gospel.

Scriptural Arguments Against Universal Evangelization

In this section I will present scriptural evidence that God saves even some in the unevangelized world and perhaps saves many. But before commencing with this evidence, I will reiterate the qualifications stated at the introduction of this chapter about important Christian principles that all should be happy to affirm and never presume to challenge. The most important of these are that there is no salvation outside of Jesus Christ and no assurance of salvation outside of faith in Jesus Christ. The intent here is not to advance an extreme position but to refute one. It is an extreme position that says absolutely none can be saved except those who hear the preached word. It is an extreme position that says God has predestined all elect to hear human preachers. It is a dubious position that says none have exemption to these senseless rules except those who are themselves senseless. These ideas are all extreme, unreasonable and unbiblical. They are claims that would have seldom been advanced had it not been for stubborn commitments to the doctrinal delusions that necessitated them. The scriptural evidence militating against such notions is replete, and includes:

1) For the greater part of world history, the Lord managed to save people without gospel preachers. I am of course referring to the Old Testament era. Objectors might say that even in that era there were revelations of Christ, and they might present such texts as Jn 8:56, Gal 3:8, Heb 4:2 and Heb 11:26 in their support. This fact I do not deny, but what these objectors tend to ignore is the deluge of scriptures placing great emphasis upon what Old Testament saints did *not* know. Paul said what Old Testament saints saw concerning Christ was “*afar off*,” (Heb 11:13). What does this mean? The scriptures are not reticent in answer to this question.

First, what Old Testament saints saw was at such a distance that their consciences were not purged from sins (Heb 9:9, 10:2), which is to say they did not have an understanding of salvation that was sufficient to set their minds at peace. This was because “*the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing*,” (Heb 9:8). What was then revealed in their religious service concerning Christ “*was a figure for the time then present ... which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation*,” (Heb 9:9-10). All this contrasts with our case now.

“How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Heb 9:14). Hence, *“...blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them,”* (Mt 13:16-17). To overstate the knowledge of Old Testament saints is to understate the blessedness that the Lord here affirms.

The gospel preached in the New Testament era reveals mysteries that had been hid in God from the beginning of the world (Eph 3:9). The scriptures make it absolutely clear that the revelation experienced in the Old Testament era cannot be compared to any meaningful degree with what we have today. This can be seen in:

*Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God’s elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began; But **hath in due times manifested** his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour. – Titus 1:1-3*

*Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, But **is now made manifest** by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. – 2Tim 1:9-10*

These texts teach that while God’s purpose to save the elect in Jesus Christ has existed from eternity, this was not “manifest” until the New Testament era. The word “manifest” means to “render apparent.” His purpose had in fact been revealed to a degree and perceived to a degree, but it had not been rendered apparent. The same principle is even more forcefully presented in:

*But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But **before faith came**, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. – Gal 3:22-25*

When Paul speaks of a time before “faith” came, he surely does not mean the grace of faith in the heart, but he means the gospel, or the *message* of faith in the revealed Jesus and His resurrection. Observe how he implies there was a time when this message had not yet come, and he did not qualify this statement in the least. This statement, and the ones presented earlier, which were also made without qualification, would have been careless and misleading were we to understand that men are regenerated by means of the message, or that absence of the message is a sure mark of damnation. So when men offer such theories, and accompany them with the claim that there has always been a gospel, though what they say is partly true, their statements are too strong to resemble biblical representations, and if the theories of these men were true, then I could hardly conceive of how the Bible would have been so strong in its emphasis on what Old Testament saints did *not* have in terms of a gospel.

Some insist that Christ was sufficiently revealed in the Old Testament to justify the claim that even the people of those times heard the gospel. It is very true that Christ is powerfully revealed in the Old Testament to anyone who views it in retrospect, but this is not so true of those who lived before the fact. Paul implied that the degree of revelation concerning Jesus Christ in the Old Testament writings significantly exceeded what people in that era actually understood:

*Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, **which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest**, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith. – Rom 16:25-26*

Hence, things are revealed in the gospel era that had been kept as secret mysteries from the foundation of the world, yet this revelation is by means of scriptures and prophecies that had existed long before that era began. This shows that one cannot conclude the existence of significant knowledge concerning Jesus Christ in the Old Testament era merely on the basis of the scriptures then existing. Those scriptures were not entirely understood. Peter affirmed that not even the inspired individuals who wrote these scriptures fully understood their meaning:

Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into. – 1Pet 1:10-12

Thus, not even did the angels themselves understand the gospel in the Old Testament era. The inspired prophets of that time actually studied their own writings to learn more. It was revealed unto them that what they wrote would be understood in later generations, but they themselves did not fully understand it.

Additionally, one must consider that over a great portion of that era, indeed over approximately a third of world history, practically none of these prophecies even existed. If the written record is indication of what was then known about Christ, we would be compelled to conclude that such knowledge was basically limited to:

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. – Gen 3:15

If God indeed regenerates by means of preaching, or if He has purposed that all elect hear the gospel, then people scattered over approximately one-third of world history were regenerated and converted by means of this single text. Yet, curiously, the Bible never even explicitly endorses this text as a prophecy of Christ. There is no question that it is. Yet, if gospel regeneration be true, or if it be true that all elect hear the gospel, then it seems that at least some scriptural writer would have called attention to the monumental role this text played over world history. It was all the gospel the world had for almost a third of its history. And to assert the world had even this requires a strong assumption. We know that Moses, the author of Genesis, knew about the promise in Eden through inspiration, but we cannot be sure that he could have

known it by tradition also. The same may be said of other things in Genesis. Moses wrote long after the facts therein recorded. He knew the details of the creation and the flood by inspiration, but this does not mean he could have known the same things by tradition too. Similarly, we do not know that either Moses or the preceding generations could have known about the promise in Eden by means of tradition alone. So gospel regenerationists really cannot prove they even had a gospel to regenerate during a third of the history of the world. Obviously, those thinking all the elect will hear the preached gospel have the same problem.

Hebrews 11 is a chapter purposed to show the uniformity of the system of salvation over the ages. It shows that, while the full gospel is a new revelation, the method of salvation is not new, but has been of force from the morning of time. It shows that even from the Garden of Eden God has been quickening His elect people and placing faith in their hearts. Yet it shows that their faith then embraced something that was seen only “afar off.” The scriptures I have presented in the last several paragraphs show just how far it was. Paul summarized his descriptions of the elect of those times by saying:

These all died in faith, not having received the promises ... And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect. – Heb 11:13 & 39-40

When this text states that the Old Testament saints died in faith without receiving the promises, the obvious meaning is that, though they were an eternally saved people, they did not have the same assurance as believers have in the gospel era.

This fact establishes an important principle, and it is at the very heart of the issue being considered. This principle is that, while God has assured salvation to all elect, He has not assured assurance to all elect. This is the very point where the idea of universal evangelism derails. It confuses the conditions of assurance with what God has actually assured. It is necessary for a man to hear the preached word and obey it to be assured of his salvation, but God has not assured that all elect will have this assurance. Assurance is not assured, “*Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure,*” (2Pet 1:10).

Another important point to be gathered from the Old Testament saints is that degree of faith is not necessarily dictated by degree of knowledge. The Old Testament saints had comparatively little knowledge, yet they were strong in faith, and they are presented to us as examples of faith, even though our knowledge is far greater than theirs. Faith is measured by the degree of conviction with which we hold what has been revealed to us. It is not measured by how much has been revealed. Hence, a retarded child with a simple, trusting heart in God may have more faith than an astute theologian.

Were anyone believing in the universal evangelization of the elect to encounter an Old Testament saint on the street today, he would surely conclude that the saint was yet in his sins. But there is no scriptural basis for believing that all elect in modern times must have, or surely will have, a greater degree of knowledge than what was possessed by the elect of those times.

2) The case of elect infants dying in infancy is a clear contradiction to the idea that all elect will be evangelized. Such cases present a real challenge to both Arminians and most Calvinists, and

have forced both to amend their doctrinal systems in ways that have no scriptural support. The Arminians are forced to contrive their “age of accountability” while Calvinists retreat to what they call “extraordinary means.” The scriptures acknowledge neither. Both are strands of tape to fix defective theories.

There can be no mistake that the Bible teaches that some infants are regenerated, and it also teaches that some die in that state. David said he was made to “hope” while on his mother’s breasts (Ps 22:9). The Hebrew word for “hope” is generally translated as “trust,” and it is obviously used in the Old Testament where “faith” would be used in the New Testament. The Lord Jesus said, *“Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise,”* (Mt 21:16). This statement was actually a quote from Ps 8:2. The Lord elsewhere said, *“I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes,”* (Mt 11:25). Of John the Baptist it was said, *“...he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb,”* (Lk 1:15). This was confirmed by his leaping for joy in the womb when in the presence of Christ (Lk 1:44). The deceased infant of David surely went to heaven, as may be seen from 2Sam 12:23. It appears the same may be said of the deceased infant of Jereboam (1Ki 14:13). The implications of all this are more than can be denied by any impartial mind.

Calvinists commonly claim that God has never had but one way of saving His people, but they will also speak of the “ordinary” means by which He does it. The qualification “ordinary” is used to allow for salvation of infants. But if there are ordinary means, then there must also be extraordinary means, in which event there must be at least two means. Multiple means would be acceptable if the Bible taught them, but the fact is that scriptures never call attention to any such differences. Rather, the Lord Himself said, *“Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein,”* (Lk 18:17).

Communication of the gospel by means of man requires that natural conditions be satisfied on both sides of the transaction. They must be satisfied on the side of the speaker and on the side of the hearer. One side is as important as the other. The fact that God has not uniformly provided for the necessary natural conditions on one side should suggest that neither has He uniformly provided for them on the other.

The absence of any suggestion in the Bible that infants or the mentally impaired are exceptional cases in the plan of salvation really casts serious doubt on the positions being critiqued. Deceased infants represent a large percentage of the human race. Even in fairly recent centuries, worldwide infant mortality rates have been around 20 percent. This statistic does not include miscarriages and abortions. The number of people over world history who have died in infancy will far exceed the number of people who have ever heard preachers. Given the significance of the case, if the principles governing the salvation of infants differ in any regard from the principles pertaining to adults, then we should expect the Bible to call attention to this fact. To the contrary, there is not a single verse in the Bible making any significance whatsoever of the fact that deceased infants never hear preachers. Nor does the Bible ever amend any principle of salvation to adapt their case. Nor does the Bible ever expressly distinguish between ordinary means or extraordinary means in salvation. Rather, the Bible treats these cases as typical.

Whenever a system of theology must add amendments to accommodate infants, this is strong suggestion that the doctrine being propounded is not biblical.

3) The universal evangelism position is inconsistent in its view of conversion. Gospel conversion is clearly subject to degree, and is in this respect different from other important steps of salvation. For example, a man cannot be three-fourths born again. Either he is or he is not. Accordingly, he is either justified or else he is not. These things are not subject to degree. However, there are varying degrees of understanding in God's people and varying degrees to which they have been converted to the full truth of the gospel. Thus, conversion is subject to degree, ranging on a continuum from the case of a regenerate infant up to the case of an Apostle. Now all parties agree there is hope for the infant and also hope for the Apostle, but the universal evangelism position asserts that on the intervening continuum there is a mystical "black hole" into which no saved person can fall. Such a claim is not only lacking in scriptural support but also smacks of superstition.

4) The Bible implies that failures in prayer and duty can be of consequence upon the spread of the gospel. Matthew wrote:

But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest. – Mt 9:36-38

An intuitive implication of this text is that if men do not care and do not pray, there will not be adequate laborers to carry the gospel to all the elect.

Those denying such a possibility will sometimes claim this commandment to pray for the spread of the gospel is not necessarily inconsistent with the idea that God has predestined preachers to reach all elect. It is indeed true that the Bible sometimes speaks of men praying for what God had already promised to do (e.g. 2Chr 1:9, Rev 22:20). These prayers were requests for reassurance and statements of submission. However, to dismiss Mt 9:36-38 with this explanation is to contradict the very premise upon which the Lord commanded us to pray. He said, "*The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few.*" He did not say the harvest is plenteous and the laborers are "equal thereunto."

Other scriptures conveying this same principle are:

Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me; That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea; and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints. – Rom 15:30-31

Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you: And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith. – 2Thes 3:1-2

These clearly suggest that the progress of the preached word derives partly from the prayerful diligence of men. As there are surely failings of the latter, then of the former also.

Men exert no deliberate effort toward fulfilling a thing they assuredly perceive God will do irrespective of their actions. To say all elect will certainly hear preaching is to destroy the logical basis for exerting effort toward preaching the gospel to those who are without it. The Bible never commands us to pray that men be added to the eternal covenant, nor that they be taken away. The contents of that covenant are certainly fixed. The Bible does not command us to make graves easy to unearth so as to facilitate the resurrection. The resurrection will certainly come to pass and nothing can aid or hinder it. But the Bible does command, “*Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature*” (Mk 16:15), and it commands that prayer be made unto this end. It follows that we are not to view such events as inevitably coming to pass.

Some who contend for the universal evangelization of the elect have actually accused the position I am here defending as hindering the spread of the gospel. Now if this accusation were true, would it not then follow that the spread of the gospel can indeed be hindered? So the accusation is clearly preposterous, being a denial of their own position. Further, it should be apparent that their own position, when carried to its logical conclusion, gives greater occasion to the carnal mind to be negligent in this duty.

5) This position logically shifts blame for deprivations of the gospel to the deprived themselves. It says that had they been elect, then surely someone would have preached to them. Such reasoning is foreign to the Bible. To the contrary, those who neglected the truth they possessed were sometimes condemned by the higher character of those who possessed it not. Consider:

And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them. For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of an hard language, but to the house of Israel; Not to many people of a strange speech and of an hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee. But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted. – Ezek 3:4-7

Hence, the Lord told Ezekiel that had he been sent to certain of the heathen, they surely would have hearkened unto him. So the Jews, who had been given the truth, were shamed by the fact that those who had not been given it would have hearkened to it whereas the Jews did not. Now the universal evangelism position would say there is some possibility of salvation among these rebellious Jews because they possessed the letter of the word, but these heathen, they say, were universally damned because they did not. It is difficult to be comfortable with this reasoning when it serves to condemn what God commended and commend what God condemned.

To demonstrate the above scripture, consider how God sent prophets to nearly all major Gentile powers recorded in scripture, and nearly all of them were highly honored and received. Joseph was sent to the Egyptians; Jonah to the Assyrians; Daniel to the Babylonians; Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, et. al. to the Medes and Persians, and finally the Apostles to the various Gentiles of the Roman Empire. These events corroborated the words of Christ when He upbraided the Jews saying, “*Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, 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,” (Mt 11:21-22). Granted, the fact they would have repented does imply they were all saved to heaven, but it is a foolishly bold claim that condemns them all to hell. Hence:

6) Those holding the universal evangelism position must commit themselves much too far on some difficult questions in the Bible. They are constrained to give answers that are either in error, or that assert more than any man can possibly know. For example, they have no recourse but to say the repentance that would have occurred had Ezekiel preached to the heathen was nothing more than a mere notional repentance. Now the Lord never said any such thing. Rather, He emphasized that, “*Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee.*” It is a precarious thing to condemn what the Lord commended. The position being defended need not make any judgment as to the case of all these heathen. It can leave this question with God. But the universal evangelism position must pretend it certainly knows that all of these heathen were condemned to eternal damnation. This it must do contrary to the fact that could the Lord’s statement be applied to any city in America today, none would question that such a city had at least some elect within it.

The same type of foolhardy commitment must be made of:

For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;) In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel. – Rom 2:14-16

Many sound interpreters of the Bible take this text to mean that the Gentiles, though without biblical revelation, had a *natural* knowledge of the law, by which they were accountable for their sins. Other sound men interpret the text to mean that *spirituality* existed among these unevangelized Gentiles. There is good evidence for both views, and a man is therefore unwise to be adamant against either. However, the universal evangelism position must insist upon a definite answer, i.e. that all of these unevangelized Gentiles were eternally damned.

To see the precarious nature of such boldness, consider: a) The Apostle speaks not of Gentiles who broke the law, but of those who kept it. Is this a mark of damnation? b) The law they kept was “*written in their hearts*” – the same terms used in Ps 37:30-31, 40:8, Jer 31:33, Heb 8:10 & 10:16 where it manifestly applies to the Lord’s chosen. c) Though the law is taught by the common light of nature, it is conveyed even more forcibly upon the conscience, and with even greater accountability to the persecuting wicked, by the example and teaching of those who have it written in their hearts by the quickening Spirit of God. Hence, Paul could have intended both of these interpretations. d) The Apostle spoke of a day in which the “secrets” of men will be judged. If by “secrets” he meant the fact that all men have a natural knowledge of the law, then this certainly is not a well-kept secret. It is a truth that is most apparent. Could he therefore be referring to the invisible work of the Holy Spirit in the heart? e) The judgment whereof the Apostle spoke was of secrets of men “*according to my gospel.*” This is a strange expression because one would not expect unevangelized Gentiles to be condemned on the basis of what they never heard. Rather, one would expect them to be condemned according to the Law. Is the Apostle saying that though they be condemned by the Law, yet the principles of the gospel afford them hope? And would not this conclusion serve to the Apostle’s advantage in the verses

immediately following wherein he shames the Jews by the example of the Gentiles? f) In subsequent verses, Paul will speak of Gentiles having the circumcision of the heart. Are these in fact different Gentiles than the ones being considered here? g) Many early Christians interpreted the text as meaning that God has a saved people among the unevangelized. Such writers included: Hegemonius, Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, and Theodoret.

7) The idea that all elect will be evangelized implies that absence of the scriptural letter is a sure mark of damnation. This is exactly what the Jews thought, and Paul condemned this attitude as putting trust in the possession of the letter and not of the Spirit:

Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law... And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? ... But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God. – Rom 2:17-29

8) All Christians acknowledge that God can make His moral law known to any man without the letter and without a preacher to preach it. It is for this reason that nearly all Christians assert the moral accountability and condemnation of all men, including those who sinned against a Bible they never read. Hence, with remarkable unanimity do all Christians here attest to the power of God to teach men without the means of other men. If this be the case, then how much more can God make Christ effectually known to the hearts of all elect without such means? If the ministration of death were glorious, how much more shall the ministration of the Spirit be glorious? (2Cor 3:7-8). To say that none are saved without the letter portrays the Spirit as being less capable than “*the weak and beggarly elements*” of the world (Gal 4:3-9).

9) All Christians acknowledge that Satan has power to corrupt the heart of any man anywhere, and that he can do it without a single sentence of written text or a man to preach it. Is it a plausible claim that God’s plan of overthrowing him entails a system that is strictly strapped to the letter and to human means?

10) Conscience teaches that not all elect will hear the gospel because we all know within ourselves that our speech and actions can be obstructions to the truth. We are under regular conviction about our behavior before children and the unconverted because we know they may be moved to neglect or reject truth if we fail to teach it, or represent it dishonorably or hypocritically. To dismiss these perceptions as being merely illusory is most dubious when:

11) The scriptures also teach that the preaching of the gospel can be deterred or obstructed by improper conduct in those professing Christianity. This may be concluded from numerous passages, including:

Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. – 1Tim 6:1

That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. – Titus 2:4-5

Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed. – 2Cor 6:3

But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died. Let not then your good be evil spoken of. – Rom 14:15-16

And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. – 2Pet 2:2

If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ. – 1Cor 9:12

12) Scriptures also teach that wicked men who reject Christianity have prevented the gospel from reaching those who would have otherwise received it:

But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. – Matt 23:13

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! – Matt 23:37

Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered. – Luke 11:52

Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost. – 1Thes 2:15-16

These texts powerfully suggest that the gospel does not necessarily reach all elect. They also show the implausibility of those doctrines that make eternal salvation to depend on human means. An irresistible end cannot be attained through resistible means. A certain end cannot be attained through uncertain means. The Bible clearly teaches that the salvation of the elect is sure, being predestined by God, but the scriptures quoted under the last two points show that the preached word is not predestined to reach all elect because it is potentially resistible.

13) The preaching of the gospel is not only resistible but also corruptible, which raises the crucial question: What is meant when it is claimed that all elect will hear the *gospel*? Does “gospel” include Roman Catholicism? Does it include Arminianism? Bear in mind that the error taught at Galatia was very similar to these systems, yet was denounced by Paul as *not* being gospel (Gal 1:6-7) and *not* being of God (5:8). For such reasons, advocates of universal evangelism will not be anxious to offer a precise definition of what they mean by “gospel.”

What then should we say about this matter? Should we say that the elect hear the gospel as a general rule? Or should we say that millions of elect will never hear the gospel? Sound Primitive Baptists of the past have made both statements; however, my opinion is that we should do neither. Salvation cannot exist without Christ, and assurance of salvation cannot exist without the gospel of Christ. It is the gospel that brings life and immortality to light (2Tim 1:10). In the absence of this light, we are in darkness on the question. “*But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes,*” (2Tim 2:23). We can be sure on the basis of scriptural revelation that not all elect will be evangelized. Beyond this we cannot know. What we can know is that God chose a people before the foundation of the world for salvation in Christ; that Christ died for them and them alone, and that He took away their sins; that all of them will be quickened by the Holy Spirit; that all will know Christ and God, though in various degrees; that none shall ever be lost; that all will be raised in the resurrection of the just at the last day, and we can know that we should preach this truth everywhere and adorn it by our lives.

Primitive Baptist Views Concerning Faith

Notwithstanding the abundant evidence here presented that God has saved and does save in absence of the preached word, our explanations cannot be satisfactory without establishing how that His saving work does, in some meaningful sense, put faith in the hearts of all his elect. Faith is so inherent to salvation that it is impossible to conceive of any regenerate, heaven-bound individual being void of it. The Bible plainly declares that without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb 11:6), “*for whatsoever is not of faith is sin,*” (Rom 14:23).

By the very definition of the term, a person cannot have “evangelical faith” without hearing the preached word, but when Bible speaks of “faith,” it does not always intend the evangelical sense of the term. Rather, it means the spontaneous embrace of the regenerate heart to what God has *directly* placed within it. This phase of faith has been called by various terms, but it could be aptly described as “basic” faith, because it is the basis from which all evangelical faith derives. This basic faith is common to all born again elect. While the Bible does not explicitly delineate between these two concepts of faith, one will never make sense of the book without having both in hand. Of course, it is important to understand that there are not actually different *kinds* of faith; rather, there are different *degrees* of the same faith, and this is a fact that the Bible definitely does explicitly acknowledge.

To many, faith is merely the product of human instruction. This is the view of some Arminians, especially among the Campbellites. To others, faith is the product of human instruction when aided by the Holy Spirit. This view is held among both Arminians and Calvinists, though they disagree on the resistibility of the Spirit in the matter. Both views are deficient in that they imply there can be no faith apart from the preaching of men. A third view takes the opposite extreme by contending that faith is the mere potential for spiritual knowledge, though it may not actually possess such. This explanation confuses faith with regeneration, whereas faith is in fact the product of such. Thus, in all of these views there is something amiss. In what follows, I will present some lengthy quotes from Primitive Baptists of the past who assiduously studied this

subject and did an outstanding job of precisely defining what is meant by “faith.” Because of the importance of the subject, I have in some cases included almost entire articles they wrote.

These able writers presented faith as originating from an internal witness to Christ and His truth. It is first given only by the immediate regeneration and internal revelation of God. It is a living principle deriving from the indwelling Holy Spirit and indwelling Word of God. It does not originate from the teaching of man; rather, it is prerequisite to such. When the gospel is preached by man, it is recognized as being true, and is believed, because the external revelation is at agreement with the internal witness and its testimony. The external revelation gives form, definition and identity to the internal testimony, which it does by connecting it with the historic Jesus and the biblical account of Him and His teachings. At this stage, it called an “evangelical faith” or “gospel faith” by many historical Primitive Baptists. Yet the internal witness may be present, along with the faith implied by it, even in the absence of the preached word, and even where the natural faculties have no ability to receive it.

This is a system that unifies the salvation of all elect in all ages. It is adapted to Old Testament saints and New Testament saints, infants and adults, the mentally impaired and geniuses, and its effectiveness is in no way limited to man and his teachings, yet it is careful not to divorce salvation from a knowledge of God and Christ. Most importantly, it is abundantly scriptural, and is the only doctrinal system accommodating the scriptures when taken as a whole. It is important to realize that what is here presented is common to all elect. When historical Primitive Baptists spoke of unevangelized elect, they did not contemplate them as falling under some different regime of salvation. When they spoke of Jesus preaching His everlasting gospel to infants, the mentally impaired and to heathen, they did not mean in some extraordinary sense; rather, they meant in a sense common to all His people. This will be abundantly evident in what follows.

The following quote from Lemuel Potter contains an unusual statement, but it does well toward setting the stage for what follows:

The literal Jews were the literal descendants, or literal seed of Abraham, but they were only one small nation. It could not have been that it was with those that all nations were to be blessed; but the Apostle lets us know that believers are the seed of Abraham. Then believers are to bless all nations of the earth – not merely where the Bible and missionaries go, but to *all* nations. – (Labors and Travels, Ch LVI, p 276)

Historical Primitive Baptists were not in the habit of referring to unevangelized elect as “believers.” Potter used a strange manner of expression here. But he clearly believed that faith and spiritual knowledge are not limited to places where preachers travel. His meaning is clarified later with:

I now quote Heb. iv, 1,2: “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well is unto them; but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.” The gospel preached presents Jesus with all the fullness of His grace and mercy, and His suitable adaptability to the needs of lost sinners, and as the only way of life and salvation, and directs the attention of its hearers to that heavenly rest for which all the saints hope, and to which faith is the avenue, and from which unbelief excludes. So then, in order to a profitable hearing of

the gospel, faith is a prerequisite. It did not profit them, because they did not have faith. The gospel preached is the food of the soul of the saint, and as our natural food must pass into flesh and blood when it is taken into a healthy stomach, so the preached word is good and profitable to our souls when we appropriate it to ourselves in faith. It is not the office of the natural food that we eat to prepare the stomach for its reception and digestion. So the gospel does not prepare the heart for the reception of itself by faith. Neither do we prepare our own hearts, as I have already proved. Hearing the gospel, alone, is of as little profit to us as undigested food in a bad stomach. Those who hear the gospel profitably must first have faith. If the gospel must necessarily be preached to them before they have faith, then it follows that they must of necessity hear the gospel unprofitably before they can have faith. If this preaching must be done in order that a man have faith, then we have it that a man must hear the gospel unprofitably in order that he may have faith, after which he will hear the gospel profitably. Now the truth taught in this text is that a man must have faith to enable him to hear the gospel in a profitable manner. This faith is the fruit of the Spirit of God. Gal. v,22: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith." If faith is the fruit of the Spirit, and a man must have faith in order to hear the gospel profitably, then a direct or immediate operation of the Spirit upon the heart is necessary; for man believes with the heart, and the Spirit is not likely to bear fruit where it is not. If it produces faith in the sinner's heart it must be in his heart. This must take place before he receives the gospel. If this is not so, tell us what is, and how you know. – (Labors and Travels, Ch LX, p 324-326)

Hence, basic faith is not produced by preaching; rather, faith must be possessed before preaching can be heard with spiritual effectiveness. Potter explained that this faith is given in the immediate work of regeneration. It is important to understand that Potter did not mean preaching *alone* is incapable of producing faith. He meant that faith is given apart from preaching. Preaching adds to faith, and gives it form and definition, but it is not the means of initiating it.

The following quote will show that Gregg Thompson's views were the same as Potter's:

The faith of God's elect has Jesus for its author; Heb., xii 2; and is an evidence that the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in us. It receives Jesus for its object, his word for its warrant, his power for its support. Its aim is his glory, and love is its inseparable companion. Faith is a fruit of the Spirit, and an evidence of our union with Christ, and of our justified state; Rom., v, 1. Faith differs from a mere opinion, or rational conviction and acknowledgement of a fact forced upon us by testimony brought to the rational mind by words and arguments used by man; for it would then stand in the wisdom of man, and not in the power of God. Paul says, "And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God;" I Cor., ii, 4,5. Man can not believe just what he pleases, or believe against clear and unquestionable testimony, for truths may be so clearly demonstrated or proven to the mind that we are irresistibly forced to acknowledge them and believe them, when there is no love for them, and in our hearts we wish they were not true; Isa., liii, 3; James, ii, 19. This faith may confess the truth, but hate it at the same time. But the faith that is of God, and wrought in us by the same power that raised up Christ from the dead, is called "saving faith," and is wrought in us by the Spirit of God, and by it we receive Christ as he is revealed in the gospel, our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption...

Faith is not a mere assent of the mind, a mere fancy or opinion, produced by arguments or testimony brought to the natural mind, for it is the "substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen;" Heb., xi, 1. It is wrought in us by the same power that raised up our Lord Jesus

Christ from the dead, and is an evidence that we are born of God, have passed from death unto life, and shall not come into condemnation. Instead of being the fruit of testimony, it is a witness testifying in the souls of the children of God, their interest in Christ, and the virtues of his blood; by this witness they are enabled to ‘read their title clear to mansions in the skies...’

There is a faith that is begotten by words and arguments addressed to the rational mind, and this faith differs nothing from the faith of devils... – (The Primitive Preacher, num 6, pp 182-213).

It is clear that Thompson did not consider preaching to be the originating means of faith. He said, “Instead of being the fruit of testimony, it is a witness testifying in the souls of the children of God...” And as he explained earlier, “But the faith that is of God, and wrought in us by the same power that raised up Christ from the dead...” so that “by it we receive Christ as he is revealed in the gospel.” So faith does not originate from preaching; rather, it is what receives preaching in a spiritual manner.

John T. Oliphant gave greater detail as to how this faith is given in:

Jesus Preaches To Souls Immediately By His Prophetic Office And Spirit

He does His own preaching to our souls, and He applies there our preaching. His commission to it, and qualifications for it are expressed this way: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted; to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind; to set at liberty them that are bruised; to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.” (Luke 4:18,19). Jesus is both preacher and physician jointly in office. Anointed and sent of the Lord God to preach and heal souls, of His prophetic office and power.

Jesus read the text above, “Then said this day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bare Him witness and wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth.” His words were full of grace. Once He said, “It is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing. The words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit and they are life.” “Thou hast the words of eternal life.” (Jno. 6:65-68). Such words are words of grace to living or dead souls. He was both life and light to men. His word in essence He coupled with His Gospel word in description; He preached to ears and hearts, too.

One says, Jesus is the great Preacher, and by His omnipotent Spirit, He preaches His Gospel savingly to His people. (Isa. 61:1 and Heb. 2:11,12 and Ps. 100:3). He preaches to souls internally when saving them. Then He makes His Gospel come to them not in words only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance. His Mediatorial office in general takes in it His offices of Prophet, Priest and King. The elect need a prophet to enlighten and teach them, for they are darkness and ignorance by sin, and a Priest to atone for, ransom and redeem them from law, sin and death. Need a King to subdue their corruptions, carnality and by conquest wrest them from satan, sin, and self, and law as Masters, and bring them into His own kingdom loyal to Him. And to save, protect, and defend them from all their enemies. In the work of His office of Prophet of God, He teaches, intercedes and enlightens sinners with new life and wisdom of His Spirit. So He teaches them to know the Lord; opens their hearts like Lydia’s of old, so as to understand the Gospel and spiritual things. “Thy children shall all be taught of God.” “And they shall all know Me from the least to the greatest,” as teaching God effects by His Supreme Prophet, Jesus. Such teaching is not done by any other man.

In His office as Prophet, He is the Faithful and True Witness, Apostle, Messenger, or Interpreter, Teacher and Speaker, which names all signify the work He does in that Office of Prophet. Miracles are the clearest proof of His prophetic office. (Jno. 2). "We know that no man can do the miracles that thou doest except God be with him." "The works that I do they testify of Me." "Believe Me for the work's sake." "Never man spake like this man." "This is My beloved Son. Hear ye Him." One of His names is Counselor. For He has made known the counsel, covenant, will, instruction, teachings of God to His own children. He opens their hearts to understand, and opens the scriptures understandingly to them. "And then opened He their understanding that they might understand the scriptures." "Did not our hearts burn within us, while He opened to us the scriptures?" "Lord to whom shall we go thou hast the words of eternal life." He only can speak these words of eternal life to souls, living or dead. At Jesus' word Lazarus obeyed and came forth from the dead, He spake to him savingly. To the penitent thief He spake savingly and said, "I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with Me in paradise." To the woman who washed His feet with her tears, and used her hair for a towel to dry them, He spake savingly, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." And to the Palsied man, "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins which are many are all forgiven thee." He preached savingly. It was a word of salvation when Jesus said to him, "Arise take up thy bed and go unto thy house." He cast out devils with His word, and by it healed all that were sick. His word was spoken savingly then. As Prophet, His calls of sinners to repentance are spoken to them savingly, and it saves them from their impenitence and hard-heartedness. His calls to the Ministry and other offices are internal, produced by His work, as God's Almighty Prophet.

"He that believeth on the Son hath the witness in himself." (Jno. 5:10). Hath the Prophet's Spirit in His own heart to cause His belief. He does not and cannot believe without the witness in His own soul. "The Spirit itself (of our Prophet) beareth witness with our Spirit that we are the children of God." (Rom. 8:16). This informs us that our heavenly Prophet assures and teaches us to know we are His sons, by His Spirit in our spirits. "Christ was put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit, by which He went and preached to the spirits in prison when once the long suffering of God waited in the days of Noah." (Peter). He preached to spirits or souls. His Spirit in Noah preached 120 years as He does now both ways yet. Sinners were "captives" then of sin, satan and law, as sinners are now. By His Spirit He preached then to souls as He does now. He preaches to them "Deliverance, recovery of sight, and their year of Jubilee."

"But the anointing, which ye have of God abideth in you, and teacheth you of all things, and ye need not that any man teach you but as the same anointing teacheth you; and is truth, and is no lie" and etc. (1 Jno. 2:27). This is an internal teaching in the soul of all things our Prophet gives of truth. Men cannot impart or improve it. It is a vital reality in souls, and is no delusion, whim or falsehood. "Only speak the word," or "Say in a word and My servant shall be healed." Our Prophet speaks healing then from wherever He is. And He preaches it to afflicted souls, to broken hearts.

No Prophet greater than John Baptist but Jesus. His is infinitely greater than all prophets or preachers. Since He preaches to souls, and He applies His Gospel to them, He verifies it in them, does a great work they can't do. (Ps. 40:9), "I have preached righteousness in the great congregation." (Matt. 11:5), "The poor have the Gospel preached to them." And applied in their hearts. "He taught them as one having authority." (Matt. 7:29 and Mark 1:22). He had a superhuman authority in His office as Prophet of God, none beside Him ever had. "Ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another," (1 Thess. 4:7). (Eph. 4:20,21), "But ye have not so learned Christ, if so be ye have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus." Jesus is heard, and He teaches Truth in Himself. "Neither was I taught it but by the revelation of Jesus Christ," (Gal. 1:12). Our Supreme Prophet teaches His Gospel by Him

revealing it to us. (Ps. 25:8), “Therefore will He teach sinners in the way.” “The meek will He teach His way.” He does miracles in teaching, opening our hearts to visions of His Spirit. His miracles prove He is a Prophet and Teacher come from God. – (The Inheritance of the Heirs of God, p 122-124)

I will include another lengthy quote from John Oliphant in which he elaborates on a closely related subject:

God’s Word In Description, And His Word In Essence Distinguished

Learn kind reader, this scriptural distinction. The Bible is called “Written Word.” The Gospel is styled “The Preached Word.” They are both a description, no more, no less. Both are God’s truthful description. They are tidings to us of good things. Not the things. But are His word affording us a description of them.

The word in essence are the things and substantial realities of all grace of Christ in Christian souls described by the Bible and Gospel. That word is the “reign of grace” in the saints. It is called an “Incorruptible seed, the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.” (1 Peter 1:23).

Of and by it souls are born again. It is also called “the word of truth,” of which He begat us. (Jas. 1:18). And “The word of the Lord which liveth and endureth forever.” (1 Pet. 1:25; Isa. 40:8). Peter shows the Gospel preaches a description of this word in essence (verse 25). In the Gospel and Bible the people hear and read only a description of all grace. We can perceive the difference easily between a description of things, and the things described.

Well, the description is given us in the Bible and preached word. But the things described are reckoned the word in essence, and are blessings in the souls of saints.

The term “Word” in scripture is much used to signify the very things – the realities of internal grace and wisdom of God, which written words describe. Thus, Christ Jesus is called “The Word of God.” And He is the Inward thought of God personified, so God’s graces and His inward purpose of them, His plan and thought to provide them, and give them in His Son is called “The Word of Truth.” Also “The word of His grace.” (Acts 20:32). “The word of faith,” and “Word of life.” (Phil. 2:16). Christ being the embodiment of His Father’s eternal purpose, and of His essential grace to execute that purpose, personified it, manifested and expressed it to men in His worship. He is hence named “The Word.”

Bear in mind, the Word in essence was all embodied in Him, and by Him it is all put forth in His saints and church. Then it is a living essence, a living entity, a divine and eternal reality in them. To them it is the real Word of life, of faith, of power and incorruptible seed that causes resurrections. It is no more a description. It is a real essence. Books do not contain it, nor convey it, the Spirit alone does that. It is no empty theory, not notional, imaginary, or only some beautiful fancy; not fanaticisms, or a whim of our brain, as some have said of it.

In it “We have not followed cunningly devised fables.” (1 Pet. 1:6). But it is a sweet heavenly reality – a reign of the Spirit and His graces in human souls now in both worlds. It is “An unction from the Holy One” – “an anointing which abides in saints,” which they have of God. (Jno. 2:20-27). “And is truth, and is no lie.” It is felt and enjoyed in the souls of saints – an inward comforting experience. It passes the dead to life, gives hope to hopeless and helpless. It imparts light to them that sat in darkness and moral death. It is the essential power, life and soul of true

and Spiritual Christianity. Of it the whole Church of God has received its spiritual existence and support, as “a spiritual house.” “For the just shall live by faith,” is God’s settled decree. There is no other method or means for souls to begin to live unto God spiritually, and in His spiritual kingdom but by this essence, the living word of Christ.

It, too, is the principal theme of the Gospel. The written and preached word explains and publishes the news of it by the help, ability and sufficiency it affords in the ministry, called, qualified and sent of God by it. The written word and preached word are descriptive truth. But Christ and the covenant of grace in Him revealed in souls is all truth in essence and substance. “It is truth, and is no lie,” means it is truth in divine essence, and no falsehood, no deception, fiction, nor what only seems to be. “The word of truth” and “life,” of which old and young of humanity must be “Born again” when they are ever saved. By this word all miracles were wrought, found recorded in the Bible...

The same Word is called, “The voice of the Son of God,” (Jno. 5:25), which the dead “hear and live” by. Dead souls hear it and always henceforth live too. Death has repeatedly released its victims at the command of this voice. And will again yield to Christ its prey at His quickening call, in the last day, by this mysterious Word in essence. “The Words that I speak, they are Spirit and they are Life.” (Jno. 6:63-68). Then they are resurrection power. Are Words of eternal life. In Acts 20:32 Paul commended his brethren “To God and the Word of His grace,” which is able to “build them up and give them an inheritance among them which are sanctified,” in the kingdom of Christ by heirship.

The Gospel is no spiritual benefit to any who have not this Word of in their hearts. We read, “Unto them was the Gospel preached as well as unto us, but the Word did not benefit in them not being mixed with Faith in them that heard it.” (Heb. 4:2). Here we learn that both sorts of the Word must be “mixed” in men if the Gospel profit them. The Word of grace or Word in essence cures sin and gives a right, pure and good heart. But it does not correct the notions, and rectify the opinions, theories, sentiments and belief of the head. It does not release from wrong traditions and old errors of former training. The Word in description, the Bible and Gospel, does that. It rectifies the head-errors. It is given us to correct the errors of our heads and our outward course and ways of life. To teach us to believe right and to do right...

When the Gospel is preached rightly, it finds a sweet response from the Word of life in the souls of saints. Then both kinds of word testifies of Christ in them, enabling them to know He is their own Saviour. The Word in essence is not an inseparable part of the Gospel, as many think and teach. They are often had separately. All “born again” have in them the Word in essence – Christ and His graces – while most of them likely have not, and never did have the true Gospel, nor even a Bible.

Vice versa, thousands of ungodly people have the Gospel and Bibles, and for lack of the “Word of Grace” in them, it is “foolishness and stumbling block” to them... Yet I want to affirm, and do assert with emphasis, God’s Holy Bible and Gospel, the Word in description, is a great moral benefit to the ungodly part of mankind who have it and read and listen to it. It is a moral blessing to whole nations, too.

Remember, morality and God’s religion are two things. But often those who had learned and memorized scriptures and Gospel in the letter of them, after receiving the new birth, have been greatly benefited by it and improved spiritually. Outside of the Bible and its Gospel of it no perfect code of morals has ever been delivered to the world in any record. The moral, civil, social, domestic and natural duties and obligations, to God, to all the world and to ourselves, are

these perfectly taught us in precept and examples. The life of Jesus certainly demonstrates it all in a perfect example to us. It has served for the “healing of the nations,” for the restraints, rebukes, reproofs and shame of all sorts of sin. The saints by it have had armour, sword and weapons of warfare against sin, the devil and all his forces, for rules of piety and duty in which to avoid God’s wrathful judgments, too. And these facts should make us zealous to teach and preach to saints and every creature, even to impenitent sinners. To teach our children and all our fellow mortals all we can. To stir up old and young to read God’s Holy Book, and correct comments and explanations of it. To diligently attend the preaching of the Gospel God has sent to us from the upper world, and not to sleight its Holy messages at their peril. For His word of description is not to be treated lightly.

Jesus said, “Unbelievers shall be damned.” Those who have no experience of grace in their hearts may have the intellectual theory and letter-knowledge, to a great extent, in their heads of both Bible and Gospel. And why should they be kept ignorant in their heads and intellects? Is its moral effects and influences bad? No, Sir. It is elevating and refining to society at large. Such is the Word in Description. Its literary and historical teaching are of the most useful and sublime. The most beneficial examples and facts and information time and ages have afforded. –
(The Inheritance of the Heirs of God, p 83-86)

The next quote comes from Samuel Trott. It presents exactly the same views:

A coming to Christ is admitted as necessary by all professors. I will, therefore, here show that Christ has said that none can come unto Him except they are taught of God. The words are, “No man can come unto me except the Father which hath sent me draw him, and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets: And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard and hath learned of the Father cometh unto me,” &c. (John 6:44-45). Thus he evidently represents the *drawing* and *teaching* as the same thing. Teaching has to do with the mind, not the animal feelings; it is an instruction of the judgment, or a giving of understanding to the things taught. But God’s teaching is not like man’s, a mere enlightening of the head whilst the heart is untouched. It is a revelation of truth in the heart, so that the affections are arrested; there is a heart-feeling of the truth taught, and a heart love for it. To come to Christ, or to be believers on Him, we must know Him in His true character as the Savior of sinners... The position I have taken relative to this subject will, I think, be admitted by every reflecting christian as the scriptural one when he considers that the promises of salvation run alone through faith in Christ, “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.” (John 3:36. See also Mark 16:16). And this faith implies a knowledge of Christ, and this knowledge evidently is only from being taught of God. “No man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son and he to whom the Son will reveal him” (Luke 10:22). – (“Christian Experience,” Signs., vol 13, 1845).

Some Calvinists might read the last quote and interpret Trott as saying we are “taught of God” through means of man. It is important to understand that when Primitive Baptists of the past spoke of being “taught of God,” they did not mean through human instrumentality. This is clear beyond all doubt when the contexts of their statements are examined. For example, Trott said in another place concerning Elijah (1Ki 19:12):

It was a *still small voice*; *still*, not outwardly heard; *small*, not boisterous; yet it was a *voice* in which the power of the Lord was heard and took effect.

Herein is the mystery of the operation of gospel grace: Men cannot learn it by the outward ear; neither the excitements of the passions, nor the power of eloquence, nor the thunderings of the law, can affect and humble the creature as does this *still small voice*. – (“Exposition of I Kings 19:9 & 13,” Signs., vol 15, 1847)

The following quote from Samuel Trott is a commentary on Heb 11:1 – “*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*” It conveys many of the ideas formerly presented but with greater analysis:

Whether we consider the faith here described, in its special relation to the spiritual things of the gospel, as contrasted with the carnal ceremonies of the law, or as exemplified in the experience of the patriarchs, or in the position laid down in the text before us, we must in either case arrive at the conclusion that it is a spiritual exercise, and as distinct from natural belief as are the spiritual truths of the gospel from the external ordinances of the law. The requisitions of the law upon national Israel as such, consisting only in the letter, could be taught by parents to their children, and were required so to be taught; and therefore could be understood by their natural faculties, and be believed as their natural judgments were enlightened. But the knowledge of the truths of the gospel in their spirituality is not imparted by, nor received from, human instruction. Even after all the oral instruction which Christ had given His disciples while in the flesh, He had, after His resurrection, to open their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures; that is, in their application to Him Luke 24:45. And before this, when Peter declared his faith in Christ as the Son of God, Jesus said unto him, Blessed art thou Simon Bar-jonah, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven; thus showing this knowledge of Jesus was not science, but direct revelation from the Father. Hence Paul says, “No man can say Jesus is Lord but by the Holy Ghost” I Cor. 12:3. See also Paul’s own experience in the case Gal. 1:11,12. But why multiply proofs on this point? For after all that men may do in their attempts to carnalize the gospel so as to make it a subject for human instruction, the testimony of God will stand sure, that, “The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God,” and that, “Except a man be born again he cannot see the things of the kingdom of God” I Cor. 2:14 & John 3:3.

But to the Apostle’s position: Faith is the substance of things hoped for, &c. What are *the things hoped for*? They are the perfect deliverance from sin &c., which is promised to the saints. Or they may be any particular instance of a promise, applied to us, like the special promise which God made to Abraham Gen. 15:5,6. There are many things which we at times hope for, which have no substance but in our imaginations, for God has never promised them to us, and consequently, with such, faith hath nothing to do. Faith is the substance of those things hoped for, that is, with a true gospel hope. The word here translated *substance* is different from the word so rendered in the tenth chapter and 34th verse. The lexicons give an explanation to this word evidently with reference to its use here, as meaning to be present to the mind; that is, to be seen or felt by the mind, as natural substances are seen or felt by the outward senses. It seems explained as by contrast, by chapter 10:1 – “The law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things,” &c. That is, the legal ceremonies could only present a shadow of spiritual things, and therefore left the comers thereunto without an actual sense of their sins being cleared away as before God; or as the Apostle says, could not make them perfect. It is true, faith, in those who had it, gave them the assurance that there was a substance thus shadowed forth, and therefore gave them hope of acceptance with God. Now, instead of this shadowy, imperfect view, faith, under the gospel, presents to the believer the salvation of sinners, as finished in Christ Jesus, and also all the promises of God as flowing through Him, and as being *in Him yea, and Amen...*

Now the faith that can do this, that can present unseen things to the mind, and constrain the mind to rest upon them as present realities, must be a living principle and possess a power independent of anything belonging to the natural mind. It is very different from that belief which is an exercise of the natural mind, and which is produced by instruction, or external evidence, acting upon the mind and convincing the judgment of the truth of the thing... The living faith has, as already noticed, a controlling power over the mind, bringing it, with all its powers, into submission to the will of God; but natural belief being but an exercise of the mind, produced by the exercise of other faculties of the mind, has, of course, no necessary control over the mind; though it may influence the mind to determine an action... What is commonly called belief, that is, of the natural mind, is of two kinds. One is a mere passive assent to the truth of a thing. It is a belief arising from education, or produced by the declarations of others without their ever investigating the subject or judging for themselves. This has no claim to the name of faith; yet a little examination will convince any one that, on the subject of religion, this is all the faith which the greater production of professors have claim to; they being in their religious characters either the mere creatures of education or the dupes of artful *priests*.

Again, there are others who are accustomed to investigating subjects for themselves; and who have thus investigated the subject of religion, and what they believe concerning it. They believe because according to the light they have, or use, their judgments are convinced of the truth of it. This is often mistaken for true gospel faith, and yet it is only a belief produced by the exercise of the rational faculties. This was the faith with which Simon believed, from seeing the miracles performed by Philip (Acts 8:5-13), and with which many believed from seeing the miracles of Christ. This is the faith which the Campbellites claim as the gospel faith; though many of those they baptize evidently have nothing more than the passive belief before described...

Faith must have an object to be believed set before it. The *word of God* is the proper object of faith. And by the *word of God*, I do not understand the Scriptures, as such, although they are the proper standard by which to know what is the word of God..." – ("On Faith," Signs., vol 13, 1845).

These lengthy quotes should abundantly prove where historical Primitive Baptists stood on this subject. I will now summarize what they have said in my own words: The basic faith characteristic to all elect is truly a mysterious thing. It may be possessed by the simplest of minds, even by babes within the womb, yet be beyond the reach of the most brilliant intellects. *"I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes,"* (Mt 11:25). David possessed it even as babe, for he said, *"But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts,"* (Ps 22:9). The word here used for "hope" is translated as "trust" throughout the Old Testament, and context will show that it is equivalent to what the New Testament calls "faith." Accordingly, John the Baptist had it even when he was in the womb (Lk 1:15,42). Saul of Tarsus, though a brilliant man and thoroughly trained in the scriptures, was completely void of it until quickened on the road to Damascus.

The scriptural facts concerning faith demonstrate that it is not merely the product of reason or logic, nor of external information. In the thousands of years the word of God has been studied by man, the spiritual mind has not produced a single rule of reason or logic that is unknown to natural science. Natural men are quite capable of induction, deduction, comparison, contrast and all other logical tools that are used in interpreting the Bible. Yet not one of them has ever been

brought to faith by these things. Infants and the mentally impaired evidently are not capable of such cognition, yet the Bible affirms they may have faith in their hearts.

The absence of faith in the carnal man is partly owing to his natural aversion to the truth that faith would otherwise embrace. Simply stated, he does not believe it because he does not *want* to believe it. The Devil presents to his mind illusions calculated to blind him to the truth, and the natural man prefers to believe the Devil's testimony because it is more suitable to his carnal palate. However, absence or presence of faith cannot be altogether explained in such terms. It is not merely an issue of what a man wants to believe. Even infidels sometimes reject certain promises of the Bible after saying they wish them to be true, and, indeed, who would not wish to think that by faith in Christ they could be delivered from malignant tumors, withered hands, blind eyes, etc? Even spiritual people sometimes struggle to believe biblical promises they dearly want to be true. Consequently, when the Lord gives faith in the new birth, this must be something more than a mere change to his tastes and preferences.

When we consider the ways in which a man believes anything, we can quickly eliminate all possibilities for faith in Christ but one: Some people believe things because of the *testimony of others* they trust. A faithful friend may report a thing and it be believed because the friend is considered trustworthy. This is not how people come to faith in Christ. The faith here is actually in the witness, not in the reported truth. If this were the only basis of Christian faith, it would not differ fundamentally from the false religions of the world. Moslems, Buddhists, etc. believe what they do upon exactly the same terms. Other people believe things because they have reasoned through them and have arrived at a trusted conclusion. For example, a man traveling through the woods may encounter a fruit he has never seen before. He might then wonder if it is good for him to eat. He then subjects the fruit to chemical analysis, tests it upon animals, etc. and using rules of reason he arrives at the belief that the fruit is good for him. This is belief by *cognition*. At a later date, he might encounter the same fruit in the woods, and upon recognizing it, he believes he can eat it. This is belief by *recognition*. Neither of these methods can explain how people have faith in Christ. They are ultimately based upon cognition, yet minds that are gifted in cognition can fail of faith, and minds not capable of cognition may possess it.

This brings us to the last possibility. It is *innate recognition*. This is illustrated by a newborn baby. The baby detects its mother's milk, immediately recognizes it, and trusts that it is good for him. The baby obviously does not do this by thinking through the matter. Nor does he trust in milk because of the testimony of others. Rather, it is because his Creator placed a concept of milk into his mind, and caused his mind to trust in it as something good for him. This is the only explanation for faith that accords with biblical teaching, and this is essentially the point that was repeatedly stressed and elaborated by the men I have quoted.

Now if faith in Christ is based upon innate recognition, then a concept of the thing recognized must already be in the heart; hence, Christ is in the heart, placed there by none other but God. It was in this sense that Lemuel Potter said, "Then believers are to bless all nations of the earth – not merely where the Bible and missionaries go, but to *all* nations." The preaching of the gospel consciously connects this faith with the historical Jesus and what He taught while here on earth, thereby giving definition and identity to the faith, and blessing the heart with great joy and

assurance, yet the historical Jesus is not merely historical; rather, He lives and preaches and saves today, directly and personally, by His Almighty Spirit.

If a theory is true, then it should accurately predict the facts of experience. So when we consider the various theories concerning faith, we should ask: What would the predictions of these theories be concerning the way in which the gospel is received in the field of practice? If faith is merely the product of human instruction, or if it is in some sense constrained by the limitations of human instruction, then we should find the gospel to affect people in a gradual and cumulative way, leading eventually to reasoned conclusions in those who are taught. The word of the Lord would be unto them “*precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little,*” (Isa 28:13). For example, we would teach them to have confidence in the Bible, presenting the prodigious body of evidence that it is divinely inspired, then teach them what the Bible actually says, beginning with the Law and its consequent damnation of all men, and then about the promises of redemption, and then about Jesus, and all proofs He was in fact the Christ and the Son of God, and then about the resurrection, and so forth, and in this labored process, using the best skills of elocution and argumentation we could muster, we would hope to bring our students to the proper conclusions.

On the other hand, if what these Primitive Baptist writers said of faith is true, this is not what we would predict at all. Rather, our prediction would be that belief in the gospel should be very spontaneous. We would expect those who are born again to react to it like an old man who recognizes a friend of long ago walking down the street. As the preacher begins to paint with words the picture of the loving and merciful Son of God, the friend of publicans and sinners, hanging on the cross, dying to redeem His own, the hearer should find something familiar in what he sees, recognizing a dear friend, possibly even an old friend, and his heart should spontaneously leap for joy.

Next, we carry these theories into Samaria (Jn 4), then to Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), then to Solomon’s Porch in the same city (Acts 4), then to Samaria again, and to the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8), then to the House of Cornelius (Acts 10), and Antioch (Acts 13), and Mars Hill (Acts 17) and so forth, and last of all, into the very journals of the modern missionaries themselves, and we put these theories to the test, and I think we would be constrained to say that the observed tendency is for the gospel to be received with an unexpected readiness, and a remarkable spontaneity, thereby powerfully attesting to the truth of what these Primitive Baptists of the past taught concerning faith.

I will finish this section by quoting from the multitudinous body of scriptures supporting the historical Primitive Baptist view on this subject:

But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother’s breasts. – Ps 22:9

Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them. For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. – Ezek 34:10-11

And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children. – Isa 54:13

And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. – Jer 31:34

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. – Ezek 36:25-27

At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. – Mt 11:25

And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. – Mt 16:17

And said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise? – Mt 21:16

For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. – Lk 1:15

Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. – Jn 5:25

And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not. – Jn 5:38

It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me. – Jn 6:45

It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. – Jn 6:63

And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. – Jn 10:16

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: – Jn 10:27

But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. – 1 Cor 2:9-10

And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth. – 1 Cor 14:25

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. – 1Pet 1:23

Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. – 1Pet 3:3-4

But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. – 1Jn 2:20

But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him. – 1Jn 2:27

If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. – 1Jn 5:9-11

These scriptures then carry us to the next text, which is a very fitting rebuke to all who would deny the plain implications of all quoted above::

Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD. – Jer 17:5

An Examination of Romans 10:13-18

All of what was presented in the previous section is oftentimes completely dismissed because of misinterpretations of the following scripture:

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world. – Rom 10:13-18

These verses obviously speak of *evangelical* faith, which, as already acknowledged, can only occur where the gospel is preached. Of course, it is the habit of simplistic minds to seize upon an isolated verse and draw conclusions that are in disregard to what the balance of the Bible has taught. The hasty conclusion here will be that there is no form of faith apart from evangelical faith, and therefore no faith and no salvation except where men preach. The scholarly will be much more cautious, as can be seen in the commentary of John Calvin where he addressed the question, “*How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?*” Calvin there said:

The meaning is, that we are in a manner mute until God's promise opens our mouth to pray, and this is the order which he points out by the Prophet, when he says, "I will say to them, my people are ye;" and they shall say to me, "Thou art our God." (Zechariah 13:9.) It belongs not indeed to us to imagine a God according to what we may fancy; we ought to possess a right knowledge of him, such as is set forth in his word. And when any one forms an idea of God as good, according to his own understanding, it is not a sure nor a solid faith which he has, but an uncertain and evanescent imagination; it is therefore necessary to have the word, that we may have a right knowledge of God. No other word has he mentioned here but that which is preached, because it is the ordinary mode which the Lord has appointed for conveying his word. But were any on this account to contend that God cannot transfer to men the knowledge of himself, except by the instrumentality of preaching, we deny that to teach this was the Apostle's intention; for he had only in view the ordinary dispensation of God, and did not intend to prescribe a law for the distribution of his grace.

I suspect many Calvinists will be surprised at the final sentences of this quote. Add to this the comments of the scholarly John Gill, who said in his commentary:

This is to be understood of outward hearing of the word, and of adult persons only; for that, infants may have the grace of regeneration, and so faith wrought in them by the Spirit of God, without hearing the word, is not to be denied; since as they are capable of the principles of corruption, why not of grace? and also of such persons as have the right and free exercise of the faculties of hearing and speaking, and not of such who never could hear, and speak; for as the Spirit works where, and how he pleases, so he can work faith in the hearts of such persons who never heard the word, and enable them to exercise it on the proper object, and cause them secretly to call upon the name of the Lord, with groans which cannot be uttered. Moreover, this is to be, understood of the ordinary way and means of believing; for though God can, and sometimes does work by other means, and even without any, yet his usual way and method is, to bring men to faith and repentance by the hearing of the word...

When this text was put as a question to R.H. Pittman in Questions and Answers, he answered it much as Calvin and Gill did, but added another important fact:

Q. How shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent? Does this mean that there is no salvation in heaven where there are no preachers to preach?

A. No. Paul was defending the preaching of the gospel, to the Gentiles. And remember, there is a gospel faith – a belief of gospel truths, separate and distinct from the faith of God's elect. The saving faith of God's elect may exist in those who never hear or understand the preaching of the gospel. Infants, idiots, the deaf, and millions cannot be reached by the preached gospel, and surely there is salvation for them. However, there is need for the preached gospel, and a belief of gospel truths is proof that such believer "hath everlasting life." The right living and right preaching of a minister also saves from false ways and false doctrines. In this sense they cannot believe and cannot be saved without the preacher, and there cannot be preaching unless one is sent to preach.

Hence, Pittman stated that it is necessary for a man to hear and obey the preached word to obtain assurance that he "hath everlasting life," but he affirmed that both life and faith may exist even in the absence of preaching. Now this is exactly the point intended by Paul. There can be no sure

knowledge of eternal salvation, nor temporal benefit of possessing it, in absence of evangelical faith. Clearly, a primary intent of the passage is to explain the words of Joel:

And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call. – Joel 2:32

Observe the words, “*And it shall come to pass.*” This was a prophecy of a future state, and was not yet applicable at the time Joel wrote. Old Testament saints could not call upon the name of the Lord in the sense of this text because the name “Jesus” had not been revealed, and their faith was not consciously anchored to Him as revealed in the flesh, nor to the events of His death, burial and resurrection, nor to the gospel as He preached it. Consequently, what they saw by faith was only “*afar off*” (Heb 11:3), and could not make them perfect “*as pertaining to the conscience*” (Heb 9:9), because the law had only “*a shadow of good things to come*” (Heb 10:1), so that it left sin heavy upon their consciences. None dispute the fact they were saved to heaven, but they did not have *assurance* of their salvation, nor can any man have such assurance until he calls upon the name of Jesus Christ in true belief. This principle is so strictly enforced by God that even Old Testament saints, of whom the world was not worthy, “*died in faith, not having received the promises,*” (Heb 11:13). So these saints were expressly declared to have “faith,” but it was not *evangelical* faith, and this explains why they were denied the assured salvation that New Testament saints enjoy today. A distinction must be made between the *reality* of eternal salvation and its *realization*. It was not Paul’s intent to deny the reality of salvation to the unevangelized; rather, he denied them the realization of it.

At least three other objections could also be made against those who misuse this scripture to teach universal evangelization. First, even they make exceptions for infants and the mentally challenged, yet the interpretation they apply to the text in question will not allow this. If their interpretation is correct, then all infants and all mentally impaired are eternally damned as surely as the unevangelized heathen. Second, they commit the logical fallacy of denying the antecedent on the initial verse, “*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved,*” and instead make it say, “*For whosoever shall not call upon the name of the Lord shall not be saved.*” All Christians are happy to affirm the verse as actually stated. It is only the distortion of the text that is in dispute. Third, examination of the entire context plainly shows that the ultimate intent of Paul’s argument was not to show that all elect hear preachers but that all of the unbelieving Jews had heard them. Now if we assume, as most Calvinists do, that all these unbelieving Jews were non-elect, then the principle would seem to be that all non-elect hear preachers! Yet, strangely, this is a principle that no one believes, nor should they.

THE DOCTRINE OF DECREES

The doctrine of decrees treats one of the most difficult subjects of theology. It is difficult to mentally grasp the issue and even more difficult to express it. Much of what many Calvinists have written about it is confusing, and the writers often appear confused themselves. Seemingly contradictory statements have been made even by the same author. Much less do various authors appear to agree with each other, yet they seldom acknowledge any differences between themselves. For these reasons, it is possible that some Calvinists will read what follows and find essential agreement with it, and be somewhat bewildered as to why their views are being criticized. Differences may be more in expression than in concept, or at least in some cases. Other Calvinists will dissent in both substance and expression.

R.V. Sarrels expressed in his Systematic Theology (1978) many of the complaints Primitive Baptists have against typical Calvinistic explanations of decrees. Though Primitive Baptists will not agree with all views expressed by Sarrels in connection with this subject, I believe he is representative in the following statements:

The Doctrine of the Decrees has been one of the great battlegrounds in the world of theology. The doctrine has been as bitterly assailed as it has been vigorously defended. Opponents of the doctrine have charged that to concede it is tantamount to linking God responsibly with sin, and to make him effectively deprive moral creatures of their freedom. Advocates of the doctrine have contended that if the doctrine is placed in its proper setting it shows that God is free from any causative connection with sin, and that it establishes instead of destroying freedom of action in moral creatures. And so up and down the field of battle the conflict has raged with never an end in sight.

Now if God has not authored sin, and yet if he has brought all events of time within the framework of a single plan without offering violence to the will of rational creatures in acting out their natures, there should be some way to state the Doctrine of the Decrees without leaving it exposed to many of the charges which are constantly leveled against it. Not indeed that this or any other Bible doctrine can be stated so the enemies of truth will not assail it, but formulations should be invented for presenting the doctrine which will largely disarm its opponents. – (p 111-112)

Sarrels complained that, while Calvinists are generally faithful to deny that God is the author of sin, their statements concerning decrees seem to imply it. What they explicitly deny, they seem to implicitly affirm. Sarrels did not charge all Calvinists with intending heretical notions on this subject, but he believed they have been careless and inconsistent in their explanations. He elsewhere placed much of the blame for this on the Westminster and London Confessions. It is true these Confessions have been the occasion of much confusion and dispute, but I think they say at least as much to favor typical Primitive Baptist views on this subject as the views expressed by many Calvinists in their individual writings. More will be said about this later. Sarrels introduced his own presentation of the subject with:

The view presented in this chapter agrees in the main with Calvinism with regard to the decrees being universal. All things, both good and evil, are, in the sense we shall later explain, brought within God's Plan, and are therefore embraced in his decrees. What God does not determine to do himself by a direct application of his power, and shall we say, to influence the righteous to do,

he permits to be done. Of course permitting a thing to be or to be done implies decision on the part of God who could have, if it had been his will, prevented that thing. Where we break with Calvinism, and with those who hold with it on this point, is with respect to God's *making certain* by decree those things which he permits. This point in Calvinism – and we mean Hyper-Calvinism – is, as we believe, not a necessary deduction. The certainty of things in the mind of God can be grounded in the perfection of his foreknowledge, as well as in his decree. To suppose that God cannot know what will spring from human volition is to limit his foreknowledge. But there are no *blind spots* in God's omniscience. There is no sound reason why an omniscient God cannot know in advance exactly what a given man will do in a given circumstance. Why should God be unable, without a decree, to make a correct pre-analysis or a correct pre-synthesis of any future event? As Socinianism errs in supposing that God cannot know what a man *will do* in a given situation, so Calvinism errs in supposing that God cannot know for sure what a man *will do* in a given situation *unless he decrees it*.

The general impression which Calvinism has made in presenting its case with regard to the decrees of God is that an effective action passed over from God to every event in universal history, whether actual or possible, and locked, or “froze,” that event so that, as the result of this action of God, the event became as unalterably fixed as if it were cast in a mold. And it is deplorable that many Men of Letters in the field of Reformed Theology still see the same things which Calvin saw, that they still arrange those things according to the patterns which he designed, and that they still discourse on those things in a terminology which he originated. All the efforts of Calvinists to the contrary, the world still thinks of Calvinism as a fatalistic doctrine. – (p 117)

Sarrels did not deny that all things infallibly come to pass in accordance with a divine plan, but he complained against the common Calvinistic claim that God could not have foreseen events in His creation without some act on His part toward those events to render them certain. Indeed, most Calvinistic writers define the word “decree” as meaning “render certain.” So when they say God has decreed all things, their meaning is that He has rendered them certain or foreseeable by eliminating every alternate possibility. This is the point at which Calvinists seem to contradict their denial that God is the author of sin. If God can foreknow that a man will sin only when He plans for him to do so, and then renders this certain by acting so as to prohibit all other outcomes, including those wherein the man would have obeyed, then it is difficult to see how God is not the author of that sin. If this does not make God the author of sin, then one must wonder what “author of sin” could possibly mean. Yet most Calvinists feel constrained to advance such reasoning because they think that if God were to truly commit the outcome of any event to the freewill decisions of His creatures, this would leave an unforeseeable state, and therefore leave God without complete control of His Universe. This conclusion does not follow, yet it seems to be the cornerstone of many Calvinistic formulations of decrees.

These complaints likely are not applicable to all Calvinists. It mostly depends upon what is implied by words “render certain.” None will deny that all things are certain in the knowledge of God, but this is an attribute of God, not a consequence of His acts. All things are certain with Him regardless of how He chooses to act, provided, of course, He has in fact resolved upon a course of action. The only thing that could possibly obscure the foreknowledge of God would be indecision within His own mind. As this cannot be the case with an omniscient, immutable being, certainty is as much a part of God as His omniscience. Each event was rendered certain to Him at the point in logic where He decided what His own role in that event would be. Therefore, Calvinists would do better to define the word “decree” as “decide concerning,” and a few of

them seem to have done so. God has decreed all things in the sense that He has decided concerning them. In particular, He has decided what He will cause, what He will permit, what He will influence and what He will compel. Once these decisions were made, all things were rendered certain in His own mind. Now Calvinists surely agree that God has decided concerning all things, but most evidently think this was not of itself sufficient to render all events certain. So they make the word “decree” contain whatever actions they think were necessary to produce certainty. This is where they err. Certainty with God is contingent only upon His resolve.

The error of most Calvinists likely derives primarily from their efforts to explain the inexplicable foreknowledge of God. Nothing in science or reason can account for God’s ability to foreknow the actions of freewill beings. So in all human attempts to rationalize this phenomenon, there has necessarily been either a denial of His foreknowledge or a denial of true freedom in His creatures. The Socinians committed the first error. Many Calvinists have committed the second, though seldom admittedly. All would do better to simply submit to this revealed truth than to distort and compromise it by forcing it to adapt to human reason.

It appears a second source of error for the Calvinists is their apparent desire to use the doctrine of decrees to advance the doctrine of unconditional election. This is evidenced by the fact they generally present these two doctrines together, as though they necessarily accompanied each other, even though there is no reason in logic why this should be so. Election is indeed unconditional, but the doctrine of decrees proves this only if it can be shown that all things are unconditional. It is then no wonder that many Calvinists seem to coerce the doctrine toward this very conclusion. Their arguments here actually weaken the case for unconditional election because they seek to prove more than is possible and more than is necessary.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will first consider the very difficult subject of the free will of man, and show how that some Calvinists, even a few of the sounder ones, have entertained erroneous notions of it. This subject obviously has much bearing on the points already raised. Next, I will present what I believe to be a proper formulation of the doctrine of decrees. This formulation will make divine decrees universal, but not in such a way to declare or imply that God is the author of sin. Finally, I will supportively discuss what the 1689 London Confession says on this subject, and will address common objections made against it.

The Problem Concerning Free Will

The central difficulty in the doctrine of decrees is the free will of moral beings and the means by which God foresees and governs their choices. Free will is generally thought to imply some degree of *self-determination*. The problem posed by this for the doctrine of decrees is that human reason affords no way of predicting the behavior of a self-determining entity. Most Primitive Baptists are resigned to accept the fact that God foresees the thoughts and actions of moral beings in spite of this difficulty. They are content to dismiss it to mystery. Some Calvinists are of the same mind. However, other Calvinists are not content to accept this inexplicable conclusion and they seek to rationalize it. The only way they can do this is by denying self-determination altogether. When this is done, the resulting doctrine is called “Determinism.” It contends that all moral beings are deterministic, which implies that men, angels and devils think, choose and act in a necessary and calculable way from their nature, prior

experience and present environment. They are essentially like sophisticated machines or automatons under this view. While this would solve the problem of explaining how God foresees their actions, it comes at the expense of creating other problems that are far worse.

The question of whether men have self-determination has been debated by philosophers and theologians for ages. Their analyses are often confusing and encumbered with distracting details. Few philosophers and theologians are mathematicians, and it seems many do not completely grasp the conditions under which a system becomes deterministic. They will sometimes deny Determinism but then advance arguments implying it. This is especially true of Calvinists. I will not attempt to review all aspects of this fruitless debate, but will distill it to the points that are relevant to the current subject. The pertinent concepts involved are *choice*, *nature*, and the past and present *environment* where this nature is placed. By *nature* I mean the *general psychological structure* of the individual. The intricacies of this structure have no bearing on the issue and serve mostly to confuse it.

Some Calvinists have held that choice derives deterministically from the nature. They claim freedom of will only implies a freedom to choose what one pleases or what is most agreeable to their nature. If the nature dictates the choice, then freedom is automatic under this definition. This explanation makes the choice predictable provided one has knowledge of the nature and the environment in which it is placed. But it does this at the expense of making human choice no different from that of brute beasts. The only difference between the two is that one has a concept of right and wrong whereas the other does not. Arminians object to this explanation because it implies man is bound to his nature. They say a man may choose against his nature. They insist that the will is self-determined, or at least partially so. Arminians must oppose Determinism because every phase of their doctrine would be destroyed if it were true, and for the same reason, Calvinists are highly tempted to embrace it. So the debate about free will has been motivated not only by issues concerning the foreknowledge of God but also by differences between Arminians and Calvinists on the doctrine of salvation.

It is surely true that moral beings are *limited* by their natures, and they are sufficiently limited to render Arminianism an impossible doctrine. The Bible teaches that natural man cannot choose for God under proper motives, nor can spiritual things be sensible to his carnal mind. He has no more freedom to be spiritual than an imbecile has freedom to be a genius. Also, the natural man might make a proper choice, but never for proper reasons. He might obey the Law of the Lord if he stands to gain from it, or if he risks loss by disobeying, but never because he loves it and delights in it. His corrupt nature is resolutely adverse to such. The case is analogous to a man eating chitterlings. Any man has freedom to choose to eat chitterlings, but few men have the freedom to eat them and enjoy them. In like manner, a natural man has the freedom to choose to obey the Law of the Lord, but not because he truly loves the Lord or His ways. All Primitive Baptists affirm this fact. It is clearly taught in scriptures, and this fact alone demands that salvation be by grace. But it does not necessarily imply that natural man is void of all self-determination. If presented with the alternatives of stealing a car or stealing a truck, he might possess self-determination in making this choice. Both alternatives are within the limits of his nature. While a hog can never assume the psychology of a turtledove, he might be able to choose between one mud hole and another. Consider also the case where a natural man is presented with two alternatives that are equally appealing to his wicked nature. Most would

assume that he need not be suspended in indeterminate limbo by such a case, but that he could in fact exercise a choice.

The question is whether the choices of a natural man are merely *confined within the limits* of his nature or if they are *absolutely and completely dictated* by his nature. The contrast is analogous to an ape being bound in a cage on one hand or being motionlessly wrapped in a chain on the other. Whatever the case, natural man cannot escape his corrupt nature without unconditional saving grace. But, the deterministic Calvinist cannot be indifferent between these theories. He must insist that the human will derives deterministically from the nature in order to attain his goal of explicating the foreknowledge of God. Even if we were to grant him this, his problem remains unsolved until he applies the same explanation to Adam prior to the fall, and to all spiritual men, and to angels and devils. This definitely seems to carry the idea of Determinism far beyond what is reasonable.

Some Calvinists have scoffed at the very concept of self-determination saying it is senseless to conceive of anything that acts without external causation. Thus, they say, all choice is completely dictated by the underlying nature, prior experience and current environment. While it is true that nothing in science or reason can account for self-determination, to deny the relevance of the concept altogether is to deny our basic intuition of God Himself. If God does not have self-determination, but is ruled deterministically by His nature, then it follows that God could not have done anything other than what He actually did. For instance, He created the world because His nature dictated it, and He could not have done otherwise because He was bound by His nature to choose as He did. The same could be said of any other choice He has ever made. I think almost any Christian would find this conclusion to be absurd. Atheistic philosophers could consistently deny the very concept of self-determination, but this is not an acceptable alternative for Christian theologians. One could perhaps say that God is confined to the limits of His nature, and this is why the scriptures say it is impossible for Him to lie (Heb 1:2), and it is impossible for Him to be unfaithful (2Tim 2:13), but to say He is rigidly bound in the sense of the Determinist is simply untenable.

Certain of the ancient Pagans actually applied deterministic causation both to men and gods, and since this logically deprived them of anything that could account for ultimate reason and autonomous government, they were compelled to adopt the idea of an invisible, mindless force called "fate," and they claimed this force ruled both men and gods. Some Determinists think themselves to be exactly the opposite of *Fatalists*, but here is a case where one led to the other.

Another common objection of some deterministic Calvinists is the idea that self-determination implies *random choice*. They conceive a self-determining entity as having a random number generator in its head contributing input to its decision-making process. This conclusion is invalid, and I think it does much to obscure the reasoning. While it is true that randomness is conceptually without external causation, it does not logically follow that something without external causation is random. Self-determination merely implies that the being is not completely determined by factors apart from self. It does not imply randomness. For example, if a man were to consistently get drunk with every opportunity to drink, his systematic behavior would not preclude the possibility of self-determination. It could simply mean that, with his first

opportunity to drink, he made a self-determined decision to get drunk with every such opportunity, and that he is a man who abides by his decisions.

The deterministic Calvinist might insist that if the man gets drunk with every opportunity to drink, this implies he has a nature to get drunk, and his decisions to get drunk derive necessarily from this nature. While this could be true, the Determinist has no way of proving his theory by reason alone. If choices derive deterministically from the nature, this would indeed imply behavioral pattern, but behavioral pattern would not necessarily imply deterministic choices. Also, if the Determinist were to be asked how he can know what is the man's nature, his only possible answer would be by observing the man's choices. So the Determinist asserts that choices derive necessarily from the nature, but he has no way of inferring the nature apart from observing the choices. This means he cannot prove his theory without actually assuming what he purports to prove. In other words, he must beg the question. It is not uncommon for Determinists to be captured in this logical trap. Though their analyses may be verbose, complex and intricate, somewhere in the midst of all the smoke, they have begged the question. It cannot be otherwise given the facts I have here related. The conclusion to which all this leads is that we cannot certainly know how choice and nature are related in moral beings without consulting Him who designed those beings. The only possible way to resolve this problem is by the testimony of the scriptures.

The deterministic Calvinist also oversimplifies the problem he purports to solve. Even if it were true that choice derived deterministically from the nature, so that nature, prior experience and environment totally dictated every decision, the possibility of self-determination would not yet be eliminated, because the argument carelessly assumes that prior experience always affects a man in a deterministic way. That is, it assumes that a man cannot help the way in which experience has affected him. The nature is not static in the case of a man. His dispositions, values and attitudes change over the course of life, being affected by experience, and good men undertake to make these changes for the better. Do men exercise any self-determination in such changes? I do not deny that there is an unchangeable structure at the core of man's psychology, but it is not evident that the whole of his decision-making mechanism is such a rigid structure.

Consider a man whose nature is to affectionately handle rattlesnakes. One day, when handling a rattlesnake, the man is viciously bitten on the hand. His attitude toward snakes is instantly and forever changed. In the same moment in which he undergoes this change in psychology, he chooses to angrily sling the snake against a wall. Hence, a change of nature and a choice occurred at once. Did he have any self-determination in changing the nature that produces his choices? As another example, consider two children doing a thing that is naughty, but both are innocently naïve in the act. Then a parent commands them to cease. The first child infers that his actions are naughty and ought never to be done, and he ceases from doing it. The second child is not so affected, yet he also decides to cease for the moment to avoid punishment. Each child made two decisions, not merely one. The first child decided to cease the action and made a decision to change his attitude. The second child also decided to cease the action and made a decision not to change his attitude. Were these decisions concerning attitude made in a deterministic way or was some self-determination involved? Again, we cannot certainly know on the basis of reason alone, but these examples show that even if we accept the claim that

choice is determined by nature, this does not preclude self-determination. The problem is not as simple as the Determinist makes it.

One of the most appealing arguments offered by Determinists is the fact that God, notwithstanding His free will, never chooses for evil. They claim this implies that freedom of will only means freedom to act as determined by nature. As plausible as this may seem to some, the previous paragraph demonstrates that the case of man cannot be entirely argued from the case of God. God does not make decisions to change his attitude but man does and should. Again, I have no argument against the claim that both God and men act within the bounds of their natures. My intent is to show the implausibility of the idea that either God or men are machines.

We always consider culpability to be increased in those who have been taught to know better. A thief is held in contempt if he is an adult, but such behavior is the nature of a toddler. A second or third offence in a crime is viewed with greater severity than the first because the criminal refused to learn. The same principle was taught by the Lord:

But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more. – Luke 12:48

Man is culpable for his wicked choices, and he becomes even more culpable when he persists in these choices notwithstanding corrective measures. But if he is bound to his nature, both with respect to what he chooses and with respect to what he learns, then he should have no more culpability on a second or third offence than on the first. This suggests there is some sense or degree in which he is not absolutely bound to his nature, either with respect to the choices deriving from it, or with respect to the experiences that should have taught him to correct it.

Some Calvinists have argued against this reasoning by claiming that culpability is always owing to nature and not to choice. These are the same Calvinists who say choice derives deterministically from nature. Their view that a wicked nature alone warrants destruction is partly intended to defend the doctrine of original sin, and in this regard they are absolutely correct. But their view that culpability has everything to do with nature and nothing to do with choice is more than they can prove, and I think it is in fact wrong. If their theory were true, then from the vantage of God, a man should be no more culpable after he sinned than before, nor should he be any more culpable after he refused to repent. His behavior is merely the necessary consequence of what he is, and though it is reasonable that he be viewed with disgust even before his offense, it does not seem reasonable that an omniscient God would view him with any more disgust thereafter. God knew what he was before he sinned, and, according to this theory, knew that his sin would be a necessary consequence of this fact.

A man may be indifferent toward a dangerous machine until it kills his child, but then he will view the machine with disgust, and He will bewail his prior ignorance, wishing he had hated the machine as much before the tragedy as he did thereafter. To hold the machine in greater contempt after the tragedy is really to admit ignorance prior to the tragedy. This cannot be the case with God. Yet it is true that wicked men, though odious in the eyes of God before they act, become even worse after they act. They treasure up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgement of God (Rom 2:5). They fill up their sins

(1Thes 2:16) and their iniquity becomes full (Gen 15:16). So their case with God worsens in a cumulative way. It becomes worse when they choose to sin, and worse yet when they refuse to learn to do better under corrective measures. This would not be expected if men were deterministic beings.

Some Calvinists offer other invalid arguments to prove the theory that culpability is entirely owing to nature and not to choice. A typical argument would be that a man who kills after little provocation is held in greater contempt than a man who kills under much provocation, and this, they say, is because the former divulges a more corrupt nature. The problem with this argument is that it compares an effect with two variables and then arbitrarily assigns one of these variables as the cause. Was the greater culpability owing to a more corrupt nature or to a lesser degree of provocation? The Calvinist can prove his case only by begging the question.

Consider the case of two men who kill under the same degree of provocation, but one man has killed in the past while the other has been an exemplar of character (e.g., Moses or King David). Now we might argue that the repetitive behavior of the first man divulges a corrupt nature, and upon this basis he is held in greater contempt, but at the same time, we are arguing that the second man made a choice that was contrary to his nature, thus we are acknowledging there is some sense in which choices are not bound to nature. An interesting thing about the argument that culpability is owing to nature and not to choice is that it must assume as false the very proposition it ultimately intends to prove. The argument is calculated to justify the theory that choice and nature are locked into synchronization, but if this be the case, then it is impossible to isolate one from the other when measuring their effect on culpability. They must be put into independent motion to do this, but that assumes the original theory to be false. This is yet another logical trap into which some Calvinists have fallen.

Yet Calvinists are to be defended for contending that all men are bound within the limits of a wicked nature, and that this alone warrants their destruction. An Arminian will cavil against this, but he himself acknowledges the same principle elsewhere. For example, he would think nothing of killing a viper at his doorstep when the snake had never bitten anyone. He knows the snake has a nature to bite; that it poses a risk to him and others, and upon this basis alone, he justifies himself in destroying it, even though the viper cannot change the fact it is a viper. Similarly, if the Arminian were to see a wolf among his sheep, he would not wait for the wolf to kill a sheep before killing the wolf.

Infidels carry the Arminian objection to its logical conclusion when they charge the Bible with injustice and inconsistency for presenting God in the Old Testament as one who destroyed men, and even demanded that entire nations be utterly destroyed (Dt 20:16, 1Sam 15:3), while the New Testament tends to portray Him as one who loves and forgives. Arminians are hard-pressed to answer infidels on this point, and even become frustrated when attempting to do so, because they themselves have incessantly preached that God loves all men, and that He would be unjust to do otherwise, so they have no choice but to drink the bitter cup handed them by infidels. Primitive Baptists and Calvinists are happy to answer infidels on this point. Had the infidel overcome his pride and learned what he was supposed to have learned about himself, he would have found neither injustice nor inconsistency in the Bible. He was supposed to have learned that men are worthless and expendable in the absence of New Testament atonement through

Christ. They are nothing but vipers and wolves, and are even worse in some regards. But the elect are loved and forgiven for Christ's sake. It is in Christ, and only in Christ, that fallen man is of any value whatsoever. Because it is necessary that these facts be understood, it was necessary that Old and New Testaments be written as they were.

Returning to the case of the deterministic Calvinist, an important fact militating against his theory is that punishment under Determinism is sensible only when it is *corrective* or *preventive*, not *retributive*. Thus, when a machine fails, we undertake to correct it and prevent it from failing again, but it is senseless to punish it, because it could not have done otherwise than it did. The philosophy of Determinism has been partly responsible for modern views about rehabilitative incarceration and oppositions to capital punishment. But this is not the view of the Bible. The Bible presents punishment as being not only corrective and preventive but also retributive. God is one who is portrayed as taking "vengeance," which is a retributive act (2Thes 1:8, Heb 10:30). Determinism also stands opposed to the concept of justification. If men were deterministic beings, then salvation would have consisted only of corrective and preventive measures. Such measures would have included regeneration and glorification. But salvation is more than this. It was necessary that reconciliation be made for past actions, which was done through the death of Christ. Determinism renders justification as unnecessary and senseless.

If all beings apart from God act deterministically, then the whole Universe acts deterministically, and if this be the case, it is a pretentious argument that assigns moral responsibility to anything in the Universe apart from God. Any qualified mathematician will attest to the fact that every internal variable in a deterministic system is totally caused by factors outside the system. Outside the Universe, there is no factor but God. If God is not the cause of sin in such a Universe, one could argue with equal propriety that He is not the cause of anything. No amount of complexity in a system can change this simple principle. Some Calvinists have unwittingly obscured this fact in a cloud of rhetorical smoke, but the conclusion remains the same. It is also true that if man is a deterministic system of himself, as some Calvinists imply, then every man is entirely a victim or beneficiary of circumstances in everything he does.

One argument commonly offered against self-determination of the will is that it would imply that the human will itself have a will determining it, and this antecedent will would in turn have a will that determined it, and so forth, so that an infinite series of wills is formed leading to nothing. This argument has little merit, and is once again guilty of begging the question, because once it is asserted that the human will must have an antecedent will *determining* it, then, obviously, self-determination has been denied and Determinism assumed. As already noted, men make decisions from their existing nature, and also make decisions concerning their nature itself, such as what their attitudes, philosophies, etc. should be. It is possible that self-determination derives from some interaction between these two things, but one way or another, our inability to explain a thing is not proof against it. As already acknowledged, nothing in science can account for self-determination. We accept it because scripture compels us to do so.

When we hear the word of God, it should sink into our very nature. For example, when God commands, "*Thou shalt not steal*," this should be more than a piece of information lodged in our memory that is to be considered in making decisions. Our whole attitude about stealing should be changed by it. We should be passionately moved against theft. We should be as the child I

described earlier who, upon discovering that his actions were naughty, formed a different attitude about his actions. Now the Bible teaches that the natural man will not be so affected. *“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be,”* (Rom 8:7). The natural man can understand the law of God and might even memorize it, but the law will not make any favorable impression on his nature. This is where Arminians greatly err. The Bible states clearly that fallen man, whatever his abilities to affect his own nature, cannot transform himself from natural to spiritual. *“But the natural man 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,”* (1Cor 2:14). The natural man may keep a commandment for the sake of personal gain, or to avoid personal loss, but never because he delights in the Law of the Lord (Ps 119:70). The commandments of the Lord will never penetrate and transform his stony heart. Nothing can do this short of the power of the Lord, Who has said, *“I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people,”* (Jer 31:33). This truth alone establishes the inability of man and the necessity of salvation by grace. But I think some Calvinists, perhaps being overzealous in opposing Arminianism, have argued for more than is necessary to destroy that absurd system.

I will summarize the important points of this section by saying that Determinism cannot be proven by human reason any more than self-determination can be proven by human reason. This is because human nature cannot be measured by any means other than observing human choices, so we cannot be certain, on the basis of these observations alone, as to how these choices derived from the nature. Though deterministic Calvinists think to logically prove their theory that choices derive deterministically from the nature, their arguments are in fact corrupted with *petitio principii*, or the error of begging the question.

I think introspection and intuition spontaneously reject Determinism, especially when the doctrine is accompanied with the argument that it is consistent with freedom of will. Such a theory says, in effect, that a man has freedom of will provided he is under the illusion of having such freedom. It says he is responsible for his behavior provided he is under the illusion of being in control. This certainly is not intuitive. But the most important fact is that since reason alone is helpless to resolve the problem, our only recourse is to carry the question to Him who designed us. If the problem has a solution, it must be found in scriptures. Had it not been for the scriptures, Determinism would have been the most logical choice. But the scriptures destroy this doctrine. They clearly portray man as responsible and culpable for his actions. They also imply He is responsible for repenting of his errors and changing his attitude to do better. He is not a machine. There is no way to make sense of this without self-determination. The scriptures teach with equal clarity that man cannot recover himself from his fallen state by his own freewill and ability, but this of itself would not imply that fallen man is deterministic. It merely implies he is limited within the boundaries of his nature. And even if it were admitted that fallen men and devils are deterministic, this would not address the case of regenerate men and angels.

Calvinistic explanations of decrees often imply Determinism even when the doctrine is denied. Calvinists commonly explain that God renders every decision of every moral being certain by making arrangements thereto. They explain that the experience and environment of the moral being is set so as to elicit the decision that God had determined. The problem with this explanation is that if a moral being is to any degree self-determined, it follows that he cannot be

determined altogether by considerations outside of self. Hence, his decisions cannot be rendered certain from our own perspective merely by external arrangements. This would require an actual invasion of the will, and the Calvinist must submit to this conclusion if he insists that God must do something to render the actions of moral beings foreseeable. It is difficult, if not impossible, to see how this explanation can be offered in consistency with the claim that God merely permits sin and is not the author of it. If an invasion of the will to elicit sin does not make God the author of sin, then one must wonder what “author of sin” could possibly mean.

All Calvinists who offer the explanation here described are Determinists whether they admit to it or not, and as noted before, if the Universe is a fully deterministic system, then God is as much the cause of any part of that system as any other. Another interesting consequence of their explanation is that it makes their usual concept of “decree” redundant. It is commonly defined as “render certain,” yet all things are inherently certain in a deterministic system. Nothing need be done to render it so, which is exactly what most Primitive Baptists said from the outset, but without asserting, assuming, or implying Determinism.

A Proper Formulation of Decrees

The doctrine of decrees seeks to find the implications of the fact that the Universe was created by an omniscient, immutable God whose every decision concerning it was made before He ever set the first particle in motion. Hence, He had a complete and definite plan for its creation and all the history that would follow. This fact has important implications, and it is these implications that the doctrine of decrees seeks to discover and present. The doctrine is not so much about the contents of the plan as it is about the planning. This point is commonly misunderstood. Many think the doctrine is primarily concerned with the extent of divine intervention and causation in the affairs of the Universe. This is not true. These questions, while being interesting and relevant, are concerned with the contents of the plan. Two men might have different ideas about this, but they should agree on the fact that God had a plan which was entirely drawn before the foundation of the world, and they of course should agree on all logical implications of this fact. So it matters not whether God micromanages His Universe, even directly controlling the orbits of electrons, or if His management is primarily indirect through the natural laws He has ordained. The doctrine should stand in either case, and it should be understood that it is not a principal purpose of the doctrine to make a commitment on this point.

The doctrine has its basis in the following facts, and, when properly formulated, asserts neither more nor less than what is implied by them:

- 1) God is a rational being.
- 2) God is the creator of all things.
- 3) God created men as moral beings having the capacity of true choice.
- 4) God has knowledge of all things, including the actions of any moral being He might create.
- 5) God acted freely in the creation, being limited neither by inability nor physical law, and was obligated to nothing beyond His own justice.

These are points upon which nearly all Christians agree. It is therefore a remarkable thing that Christians have so much disagreement on decrees.

The third fact may seem out of place among the others since it says more about the plan than the planning. However, a distinction must be made between God's government over mind and his government over matter. This distinction necessarily carries into the planning process itself, hence the inclusion of the third fact. The first and fourth facts are of particular importance. They are generally at the very root of the confusion and controversy associated with this subject.

As to the first fact, all will agree that a rational being is necessarily one whose decisions are made in consideration to all their foreseeable consequences. This is true whether they be decisions to act or decisions not to act. If any rational man makes a decision having foreseeable consequences, then those consequences were surely considered when his decision was made. It could at least be said that he considered those consequences sufficiently to conclude they should not prevent his decision. Now with God, all consequences of every decision were foreseeable. Further, every event that comes to pass occurs in a chain of events that ultimately traces back to a decision of God. Of course, at various links in this chain, there could be the freewill actions of men and devils largely dictating the links that follow, but these actions were preceded by a divine decision to create such beings and permit them to act out their wills. It cannot be supposed that God made any such decision in ignorance or willful oblivion to any link in the chain of events that would follow it. So all events were considered when God formulated His decisions, and it is with some reason that these events occur, either being brought to pass through His decisions to act, or permitted to come to pass through His decisions not to act, but in either case, these decisions surely had some purpose in view.

It is error to allege that God is the *cause* of every event. This impugns Him as the author of sin. It is also error to allege that any event comes to pass without consideration and *reason* in His mind. This impugns Him as being either ignorant or irrational. This distinction between *reason* and *cause* can be seen in:

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. – James 1:12-13

Therefore, God is not the cause of evil temptations, yet He permits them for His good reasons, one being that He may try His people and bless those who endure them.

The first, second and fourth points combine to produce a very important conclusion, namely, that every decision of God concerning His Universe was made in eternity. He is not waiting for events to unfold so that He can decide His own actions. Whether an event would occur deterministically under natural law, or whether it would derive from the freewill act of a moral being, God knew it and comprehended all aspects of it. Since He is a rational being, and since all events would be direct or indirect consequences of His decision to create, He considered them all, and every decision He would ever make concerning them was made prior to His commitment to act. To allege otherwise is equivalent to saying that either He is irrational or that there were some aspects of His Universe He did not know or did not understand. James said, "*Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world,*" (Acts 15:18). Isaiah affirmed the same:

“Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure,” (Isa 46:10).

The fourth point is most consequential to this doctrine, but one wherein many err – some by making too much of it, and others by making too little. Those who make too much of it reason that if God infallibly foresees a thing, then because that thing *will not* happen otherwise, then in fact it *could not* happen otherwise, so the event, they say, is effectively predestined. This reasoning confuses causes and effects. The event is foreseen as a consequence of the fact it will happen. It does not happen as a consequence of the fact it is foreseen. Foresight of itself is no more causative than hindsight. The fact that one can see in hindsight that Abraham Lincoln was assassinated does not make them the cause of his death, nor does it remove any degree of responsibility from the actual assassin. Then there are others who reason that God could not foresee an event unless He intended to compel that event into being. This reasoning reduces the foresight of God to that of a man, who, for example, could not infallibly foresee another person falling off a cliff unless he had purposed to shove him.

As already noted, many Calvinists seem to err in the latter respect. To them the principal purpose of the doctrine of decrees is to explain the foreknowledge of God to the satisfaction of the limited human mind. In their attempts to do this, they invariably venture into Determinism, because the human mind cannot conceive of foreknowledge except in these terms. But Determinism has implications that are loathsome even to Calvinists, and are very much at odds with the clear teachings of the Bible. When their reasoning adds up to Determinism, and therefore clashes with assertions they have elsewhere made in denial of this doctrine, Calvinists oftentimes dismiss the apparent conflict to mystery.

However, if we must build our reasoning around mysteries, then the fewer the better, and if presented with a choice between one mystery or another, we should choose the mystery that best carries us toward conclusions that are at harmony with the Bible. This being the case, the foreknowledge of God should be taken *as given* by the doctrine of decrees, not to be *explained* by it. We should accept the fact that we cannot explain how God can foreknow the actions of freewill beings, because if we submit to this single mystery, most else tends to fall into place according to our usual rules of reason. On the other hand, if we do not accept this mystery, but insist upon explicating it, then other things will fall out of place, and we will find ourselves having to submit to mysteries on other points, but mysteries that are much less appealing to our intuition and to scripture. The worst of these is the supposed mystery that God, without any consideration to the motions of our wills, decided all our decisions and actions, even the sinful ones, yet this, or so it is alleged, does not make Him the author of our sin. This alleged mystery is counter to our conscience and contrary to the tenor of scripture. But one need not propose this dubious mystery under proper assumptions. The doctrine of decrees should assume the foreknowledge of God, and then seek to find the implications of this assumption.

This brings us then to the opposite extreme where we have those who make too little of the foreknowledge of God. This they do by making God a mere spectator to some or many events in His Universe. This error is much like that of Calvinists in that it takes an anthropomorphic view of God’s foreknowledge. Since a man cannot foresee the actions of a freewill being unless he intends to constrain or compel that being, some Calvinists seem to reason that God must do the

same. Similarly, those on the other extreme suppose that because a man can be a mere spectator to an event, the same must be true of God. Neither view is correct. Both err in reducing the foreknowledge of God to that of a man.

The problem with making God a mere observer to any event is that it is inconsistent with the claim that He is the sole author of the Universe. A man may behold an event without being any part of it, but this obviously cannot be true of God, because without His own works there would be no event to behold. When we assert that God foreknew every event of His creation before He ever started it, this knowledge obviously could not derive from God inspecting things that are independent of His thoughts and actions, because in absence of these thoughts and actions, those things existed neither in fact nor in concept.

This observation exposes the error of those who suppose that God foresees the future by an ability to *transcend* time. These will explain that God views time as a man views a picture on the wall, seeing all parts of the picture at once. While none should question His ability to comprehend any number of events at once, this explanation cannot completely account for His foreknowledge. One cannot view a picture on a wall if neither the picture nor the wall has been created. One cannot transcend time if there is no time to transcend. Science fiction oftentimes dreams of men traveling through time by means of magic or machines. In some respects such reasoning might be sensible when applied to men, but it is not sensible when applied to God. It would have God traveling a road that is not yet built, and will never be built unless He Himself builds it. God is not a time traveler. Rather, He is the time designer and builder.

It follows that if God foreknew all events before He set the first particle in motion, those events were foreseen when they existed only as thoughts in His eternal mind. As He is a rational being, all real events were first contemplated as possibilities existing among the infinite alternatives made available by His endless power. From this pool of all possible events, He then chose which events would actually occur. Such decisions are called “decrees” by most theologians. One might think of any event as passing through three stages in becoming reality. In the first stage it is a mere possibility, or a thing that *could be*. In the second stage it becomes an event that surely *shall be* in God’s infallible foreknowledge. Finally, it becomes an event that is. A “decree” is a decision dictating which events pass from the first stage to the second, and such decisions were necessarily made by God because there was no one else to make them.

It is important to observe that Divine decree does not altogether dictate what exists in the realm of possibility for a Universe that is to contain freewill creatures. Upon the decision to grant these creatures the capacity of choice, the realm of possibility will be considerably expanded, and made to include, among other things, the possibility of rebellion against the Creator. A Divine decision that these possibilities will become realities is obviously one of *permission*. By “permission” I mean to allow without giving approval or authority.

In recognition of the necessity to make this distinction between possibility and reality, some writers have applied the words “foreknowledge” and “foresight” only to the latter, and have applied the term “knowledge” to the former. These particular writers would not speak of God “foreknowing” or “foreseeing” something that was a mere possibility. For example, they would not say God “foreknew” that if Adam had obeyed, then... Their reason is that such language

would have God foreknowing something that never happened. Rather, they would say God “knew” that if Adam had obeyed, then...

This is of course a question of words, but one which proves of great consequence at later points in their explanations. In particular, they will elsewhere explain that the foresight of God is based on His decrees. This assertion might convey the impression that if God foresaw a man committing sin, then it was because God purposed to constrain or compel the man to do so. However, such ideas are not necessarily intended. These misimpressions derive from a failure to recognize the exact meaning intended by the word “foreknowledge.” In the language of these writers, God “knew” that if the man were created and left to act out his will, then the man would commit sin; however, such an event was a mere possibility until God decided or decreed that He would in fact create the man and permit him to act freely. At the point God so decided, the man’s sin became a pending reality, or an event that would actually occur, and was therefore “foreknown” of God. Hence, the terminology would be that God “knew” the man would sin before the decree, so it is not the decree that caused the man to sin, but God “foreknew” the sin only after the decree. It is in this sense that foreknowledge is based on decree.

To further illustrate these ideas, consider two circles of unequal size, with the larger circle being on the left and the smaller on the right. Let the larger circle be the set of all possible events. It includes not only all things that have been and shall be, but also all things that might have been. Let the smaller circle contains all actual events. These are things that have been or shall be. Now let us introduce to the larger circle the possibility of moral beings, or beings capable of true decisions, including decisions to act against the will of their Creator. The effect of this is to make the larger circle even larger yet, as it must now accommodate not only all possible decisions of the Creator, and their consequent effects, but also all possible decisions and outcomes of the moral beings He might possibly create.

Now decisions must be made as to which events in the larger circle are to pass to the smaller circle. These decisions must necessarily be made by God since He is the only decision-maker having an existence at this point in our reasoning. These decisions are “decrees.” Every event in the smaller circle is preceded by some such decision, because if anything in that circle could escape God’s prior considerations, then nothing in that circle could be certainly foreknown. Naturally, if the transferred event is an act of disobedience, then the decree is one of permission; otherwise, the term “disobedience” could not possibly pertain. Adopting the language of many theologians, we would say that all events in the larger circle are “known” of God, and that all events in the smaller circles are “foreknown” of God. Under these definitions, it would follow that God’s foreknowledge is based on His decree, and His decree is based upon His knowledge.

This brings us then to the fifth point presented at the outset, namely, that God acted freely in the creation, being limited neither by inability nor physical law, and was obligated to nothing beyond His own morality. This fact is very important. When combined with other facts with which it was listed, the conclusion is that God is an absolute Sovereign over His Universe, both with respect to His authority and with respect to His control. However, this is the point where needless controversy oftentimes erupts over this doctrine. It is thought that if His control is absolute, even over the sinful actions of men and devils, then those actions must be chargeable to His control. Accordingly, it is thought a contradiction to assert that men and devils are truly in

control of their own actions while asserting that God is also in control over those actions. Verily, in our ordinary way of thinking, it is impossible for two adversarial forces to be simultaneously in control of the same thing at the same time. However, the case being considered is far from ordinary. When one fully considers the five points listed at the beginning of the chapter, not only are these seemingly contradictory claims reconcilable, but they are actually inevitable.

In proof of this claim, consider a second example of a simple Universe that is to consist only of a single field and a single man placed in the center of the field. This man is to be given the capacity of choice and complete latitude to exercise it. He may therefore depart the center of the field walking in whatever direction he chooses. Since the man is to be afforded this freedom of will, some might reason that his Creator is to relinquish all control in the matter, or that beyond the point of the man's decision, the Creator will have no choice but to adapt Himself and His plans to the actions of the man. This would of course make the man sovereign and place the Creator in a passive role. But this assessment fails to consider that the man is not yet created. He is at this point a hypothetical entity – a mere possibility – existing only in the mind of his Creator, who is under no obligation to create any man, nor any obligation to create this particular man, and has power to create any one of an infinite number of other men in his place. This all-knowing, all-foreseeing Creator knows what the man's actions will be if created, and knows what the actions of any other man would be if created in his stead. In particular, suppose the Creator could make man A, or man B, or man C, and so forth. The Creator knows that man A, if created and left to act freely, will walk to the north, but man B will walk to the south, and so forth. Therefore, this Creator, being endowed with infinite power and perfect knowledge, is truly in absolute control of His Universe, yet it is simultaneously true that the created man is in absolute control of himself, and is in every respect responsible for the decisions he makes. So we arrive at a conclusion that would ordinarily be impossible, but both possible and inevitable in the special case considered, namely, that God can be a complete Sovereign over His Universe, while at the same time men can be in control of their actions and responsible for them.

An important aspect of this example is that the Creator makes no act of intervention subsequent to His work of creation, yet this fact does nothing to diminish His control. This is why we said from the outset that the doctrine of decrees is not principally concerned with the extent of divine intervention into the affairs of the Universe, even though most people misconstrue the doctrine as emphasizing this point. The conclusions of the doctrine stand regardless of whether God frequently intervenes, infrequently intervenes, or never intervenes. While the extent of His intervention is an interesting and relevant question, the doctrine of decrees is principally concerned with other things.

Some might dispute the conclusion that God is a complete sovereign in the example just given because it does not consider the possibility where God desired to create a *particular* man *and* desired this particular man to depart the field in a particular direction. Nor does the example consider the case where, out of the set of all possible men, there was not a single man who would freely choose to walk in a direction pleasing to the Creator. These cases verily present a problem for Arminians but not for believers in sovereign grace. The latter have no objection to the notion of God imposing His will upon creatures in moving them toward good. Hence, were there some particular direction that God would have some particular man to walk, it would be within His power and prerogative to so move the man. Indeed, grace believers affirm that out of the set of

all men, there was not a single man freely choosing to walk as the Lord would have him go, but that by His sovereign grace, some men were irresistibly moved to do so. Arminians of course object to this, or at least in matters of salvation, saying that God could not be just in moving one man to good without extending the same favor to all.

Now when we say God is a complete sovereign over His Universe, this means He is in complete control *to execute His will*, and our principal point here has been that such remains the case even after He has endowed certain of His creatures with the capacity of choice. Such claims are not contradicted by examples of hypothetical outcomes that are contrary both to His will and to the wills of all His creatures. So, returning to the example, were there some direction that no man would freely choose to walk, this fact would not contradict the sovereignty of God unless He Himself desired that some man, or some particular man, walk in that particular direction and unless He were powerless to so move him. For this we do not contend.

To further clarify the terms and concepts here set forth, consider yet another example involving a man standing at the top of a cliff holding a rock and poised to throw the rock off the cliff. This he will do without any coercion or constraint, but as the result of his own free choice. A second man upon inspecting the circumstance could *foresee* that the rock would end at the bottom of the cliff. This prediction is drawn by observing *existing* realities and drawing conclusion based on *existing* laws of nature, particularly the law of gravity. This second man is neither causal nor determinative to the event in any respect. He is merely a spectator. Now contrast this to God's foreknowledge of the same event. God's role in the matter neither is, nor can be, the same as that of the observing man. When God first considered this same event, it was before the foundation of the world when neither the man nor the cliff nor the rock existed, nor had the laws of nature yet been enforced. Nor was there any necessity on God's part to bring these things into existence. They were merely hypothetical events existing nowhere outside His infinite mind, and they were initially there as *potential* events, not *pending* ones. It was then within His power and prerogative to put infinite other scenarios in place of the circumstances here described. Instead of the cliff, He could have placed a river, corn field or parking lot. Instead of the man, God could have placed a different man or no man at all.

At this stage God *knew* that if He were to create this particular man and put him in this particular circumstance and leave him to act out his will, the man would in fact throw the rock. However, properly speaking, God did not *foreknow* this at the point being considered because there had not yet been a decision to actually bring this man and these circumstances into being. Upon making the decision to create the cliff, the rock and this particular man, and to leave the man to himself to act out his own freewill, the relocation of the rock was no longer a potential event. It then became a pending event, and was at that point *foreknown* or *foreseen* of God. The decision to this effect was a *decree*. By this decree God *determined* that a rock would end at the bottom of the cliff. God obviously is not a mere spectator to the event as another man might be. The displacement of the rock is in a sense the result of the decision God made. But God is not the chargeable *cause* of this event. It was the man who threw the rock, and he did so without any compulsion or constraint being applied by his Creator. When God decided that He would create this man, and not another, and create this cliff, and not a corn field, and leave this man to act out his own will rather than compel or influence him, He thereby *decreed* or *ordained* the relocation of the rock.

However, it would be an unconventional use of terms to say God *predestinated* the relocation of the rock. This term is everywhere used in the King James Bible in reference to things that God causatively and unconditionally brings to pass. Many theologians have placed similar limitations on the term, and nearly all Baptist creeds, including the London Confession, have done the same. God did not cause the rock to be thrown, nor was His decision concerning it unconditional in the sense of being invariant with respect to the will of the man. One could properly say that God predestined the existence of the rock and the cliff and the man, but not the relocation of the rock. Rather, this was *decreed*. Any predestined event is obviously decreed, but a decreed event is not necessarily predestined.

Observe that the man in the example is in complete control over his actions, yet God too is in complete control as a consequence of His power to confine this whole scenario, or any part of it, to the realm of the hypothetical, thereby prohibiting it from reality. Add to this His power to put infinite other scenarios in its place. Also observe that in the example, there was no divine intervention subsequent to the act of creating, but events were altogether allowed to fall out according to nature. This illustrates that when the doctrine of decrees asserts the absolute sovereignty of God, it is not necessarily commenting upon the extent of His intervention subsequent to the act of creating. Even a Deist could accept the reasoning here presented, though he of course would prove very heretical at other points.

Returning to the term “decreed,” the simplest definition that could be assigned to it is “decide concerning.” This definition has shortcomings, but serves well for most purposes. When we say God has decreed all things that come to pass, the meaning is that He has *decided concerning* them. In particular, He has decided what He will cause, what He will permit, what He will prevent, what He will influence and what He will compel. God is not waiting to see how events will unfold in order to make decisions as to His own actions. These decisions were all made in eternity before the Universe was ever created, and when these decisions were made, no event in that Universe was ignored or overlooked.

This simple definition is also useful toward characterizing the extreme positions taken on either side of this subject. Some have effectively advocated that God has *decided* all things that come to pass. They omit the word “concerning” from our simple definition of “decree.” This view has been carried to such extremes that some have implied, or even claimed, that the sinful decisions of freewill beings were themselves decided by God. So, for example, if a man were to decide to get drunk, this is because God decided he would make this decision, and that God then acted so as to produce this result. This absurd doctrine clearly reduces the man to a mere puppet and makes God responsible for the sinful actions of the man. God has not decided all things that come to pass. Many things come to pass as a consequence of the decisions of rebellious men and devils. However, God has decided *concerning* all things that come to pass, including what His own role will be toward these rebellious decisions of His creatures.

The error on the other side says that God has *not* decided concerning all things, or equivalently, that there are many things concerning which God has decided nothing. These things are simply given to chance. Indeed, some who are disposed to this view will quote the proverb, “...*time and chance happeneth to them all*” (Eccl 9:11), as though there were some mystical coin that dictates

many of the events in the Universe, and that God has been content to commit the outcomes of these events to the vagaries of this coin. Those who so abuse this proverb fail to recognize that the same scriptural writer elsewhere said, *“The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord,”* (Prov 16:33).

The idea that some mystical force called “chance” dictates many events in the Universe is so far-fetched that one would have to depart the realm of orthodox Christianity to find sympathizers with it. Only the pagan fatalists made such claims. They believed there was an invisible, mindless force in the Universe called “fate” that sealed the destinies of all, and they went so far as to say that even their gods were subject to it. As Christians see it, this claim is contradictory within itself, because it is an admission that their gods were no gods, and that the true sovereign over the Universe is in fact fate.

In similar manner, if one believes in the mystical coin before-mentioned, they have essentially put four in the Godhead: The Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost and the Coin. While their view would likely have the first three having power to overrule the coin, the theory remains unlikely, because it says in effect that God lacks power to discriminate between certain alternatives, and that He has therefore committed these to the coin. Now believers in God constantly wrestle with the same problem, not knowing whether to turn to the right hand or left, so they turn instead to the Lord for direction, but there would not be much hope in this if God Himself were subject to the same kind of indecision.

Further, this idea is much like the errant Calvinistic views before considered in that it resorts to contradiction and pseudo-logic to support its claims. The concept of chance is no more explicable than the claims of those Calvinists who deny God is the author of sin even if their logic makes Him such. Chance is not a scientific concept. Chance begins where science ends. Most understand that chance is merely in the eye of the beholder. If the beholder cannot comprehend or fully sense the phenomenon before him, then it will *appear* to behave according to chance. So a man tossing a coin cannot predict the outcome, but a man tossing a manhole cover can do so quite easily. One event is governed by the same laws of physics as the other, and both are equally deterministic in their outcomes; however, the human mind can comprehend and control one but not the other. Chance is in the eye of a beholder having limited knowledge and perspective. If the beholder is God, then there is no chance.

We will conclude this section by returning to objections raised by Sarrels against the claim of many Calvinists that divine foreknowledge derives from divine decree. As is often the case, the accuracy of this claim depends upon what is meant by its terms. The word “decree” is frequently defined by these Calvinists as “render certain,” but this definition helps little toward determining their exact intents. The question is *how* were events rendered certain? If the answer is they were rendered certain by a coercive action that prohibited all alternatives, then the definition is wrong. If the answer is they were rendered certain when God decided concerning them, then the definition is correct. The latter definition correctly assumes that nothing can obscure the foreknowledge of God apart from indecision within Himself. Hence, at the point where God became resolved as to what His own actions would be, all events in His Universe were rendered certain from His lofty perspective. But the former definition incorrectly assumes that the foreknowledge of God is subject to the same limitations as that of a man, so that no event could

be infallibly foreseen unless there was some prior intent to compel that event into being. This view cannot be reconciled with the claim that men act freely in their sins.

The next term in question is “foreknowledge.” If this term is applied to both actualities and possibilities, then it is in error to assert that foreknowledge derives from decree, because then decree would dictate possibility. In that case, the assertion that God decreed for a man to sin would imply that the man was left with no possibility of obedience. However, if “foreknowledge” is applied to actuality only, then there is indeed a sense in which foreknowledge is based on decree. In that case, the possibility of the sin is first “known” of the omniscient Creator, but it does not become a pending actuality until the decree to permit it, at which point it becomes “foreknown.” Hence, “foreknowledge” then has basis in decree.

Which of these definitions do Calvinists intend? Unfortunately, the answer to this question is not always clear. One must inspect context to ascertain their meaning, and oftentimes not even this resolves all ambiguity. However, some of them surely seem to have entertained wrong ideas.

Examination of the London Confession

The 1900 Fulton Confession of Faith of the Primitive Baptists was based on the 1689 London Confession of Particular Baptists. The 1689 Confession is commonly misunderstood, particularly on the subject of decrees. Its critics oftentimes charge it with teaching Determinism, or what Primitive Baptists commonly call “Absolutism.” This is somewhat ironic, because the Primitive Baptists at Fulton actually used the document to refute this very doctrine. In what follows, I attempt to examine the controversial articles in the Confession on this subject and show that the Fulton brethren had a proper understanding of the document.

The Confession begins its chapter on decrees (ch 3) with the following article:

3.1 God hath decreed in Himself, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably, all things, whatsoever come to pass; yet so as thereby is God neither the author of sin nor hath fellowship with any therein; nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor yet is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established; in which appears His wisdom in disposing all things, and power and faithfulness in accomplishing His decree.

Objection to this article mostly derives from misunderstanding of the word “decree.” It is errantly taken to mean “predestinate.” However, if one will examine how the latter term is used elsewhere in the Confession, it will be found that it surely does not fit in this article. The Confession everywhere uses “predestinate” in the same sense as the King James Bible. It means to causatively and unconditionally bring to pass. “Decree” should be taken here as meaning “to decide concerning,” or more exactly, “to decide that a potential event will become reality.” So decree first considers all the things that *could be*, and then decides which of these *will be*. The potentiality of an event may derive in part from the decision capacity of men or devils, in which case the event becomes reality only if God creates them and their circumstances and permits them to do what He knows they would do in that case.

When God purposed to endow men and devils with the capacity of choice, the realm of possibility was considerably enlarged, and made to include, among other things, the possibility of rebellion against the Creator. This fact did nothing to diminish His sovereignty, because He remained the final arbiter dictating which of these possibilities would become realities and which of these possibilities would never be anything more than hypothetical.

The decrees of God were done by the “most wise and holy counsel of His own will.” Hence, God’s decisions concerning His creation were made in complete knowledge of what the consequences would be, and in complete knowledge of what consequences would have been under alternate scenarios.

The article affirms that God did these things “freely.” This has important implications, with the most important being that He was under no obligation or constraint to create any man, or any particular man, or any particular thing or circumstance. In any particular circumstance in which a particular man sins, God could have created another circumstance in which that man would not have sinned, or God could have placed in the same circumstance a different man who would have acted a different way. The word “freely” therefore implies His absolute sovereignty, yet it does nothing to diminish the freedom and responsibility of the man. The fact that God acts freely does not imply that men act without freedom. If a man is indeed left to act freely, God remains an absolute sovereign, because His decision to afford the man such latitude was not only made in complete knowledge but also in complete freedom.

The article says that God has done these things “unchangeably.” This word is commonly misunderstood. It does not mean that if a man sins he could not have done otherwise. Such an interpretation would contradict the remainder of the article. Rather, it means that the decisions God has made concerning His Universe are unchangeable. God does not change His mind. Since God’s foreknowledge of His Universe could only be obstructed by indecision within Himself, the fact that He has made a settled decision concerning all events implies that His foreknowledge has been made infallible.

The next article has possibly been the occasion of even more confusion than the first:

3.2 Although God knoweth 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.

This article is sometimes misunderstood as meaning that God decided all events without any regard to the decisions of His creatures. So, it is taken to mean that even though He knew what the decisions of His creatures would be under any set of circumstances, this knowledge had no bearing on His decree as to those circumstances or their outcomes. So, for example, if a particular circumstance results in a particular man getting drunk, the article is interpreted as saying that the man got drunk because God decided he would get drunk, and that God made this decision without any regard to the will of the man. This interpretation is completely at odds with what is elsewhere said in the Confession regarding the freedom and responsibility of men, so we must assume such ideas were not intended.

The error of the interpretation derives from misunderstanding of the word “foresaw.” As explained in the previous section, many theologians use this word only with reference to *actual* events. They do not use it with reference to merely *potential* events. The fact that a potential man would act in particular way in a potential circumstance is surely “known” of an omniscient God, and His decree might indeed be in consideration of this “knowledge,” but, in the terminology of the Confession, neither the circumstance nor the man nor the outcome are “foreknown” or “foreseen” of God until there is a divine decree that these mere potentialities become realities. Events are “foreseen” because they decreed. They are not decreed because they are foreseen. “Foresight” of what *shall be* is based on decree, which is in turn based on “knowledge” of what *would be*.

The last paragraph shows how crucial terminology can be on this subject, and how easily conflict can result because of subtle differences in definitions. Now suppose the word “foresaw” were not defined as the London Confession intended, but that the term were applied both to the actual and possible. That is, suppose we were to speak of God “foreseeing” what *could be* or *would be* as well as of Him “foreseeing” what actually *will be*. Defining the term in this unintended way, the article being considered becomes most objectionable. It would then imply that, though God “foresaw” what a man *would do* under any supposed condition, yet His decree as to the man’s action was without any consideration to what He “foresaw.” Hence, it would not matter whether the man *would have* obeyed or *would have* disobeyed in that supposed condition, God decided the man’s action, whether of obedience or disobedience, without any consideration to this fact. This obviously destroys all freedom in the man and reduces divine permission to nonsense.

This article eliminates the idea that God decreed some things, then peered into the future to see their consequences, then decreed other things or modified the decrees He had already made. A man, being unable to comprehend all possibilities at once, will typically begin with a plan, then as he works through the plan and sees or foresees problems and omissions with his original intents, will adjust that plan accordingly. The man is, in effect, making multiple decrees, sequentially arranged, and with his understanding being developed as he goes. Such was not the case with God. When God contemplated all possible scenarios for His Universe, each scenario was entirely comprehended at once, and either the whole scenario was decreed at once or the whole scenario was rejected at once. While we may speak of the “decrees” of God in the plural, there was in this important sense only one decree, and there was no future whatsoever until that decree was made.

This article also accommodates the fact that God not only decreed the Universe, but also the laws of cause and effect by which it would be regulated. So while God has decreed both causes and effects, He did not decree the effects simply because they were the effects; rather, He decreed that they *would be* the effects. A man might submit to an undesirable consequence of his action if he were to see that action as necessary, but he would prevent the consequence were it within his power to do so. In his decision to perform the action, the man has also wittingly decreed the undesirable consequence, but he has done so because he foresaw it as necessarily coming to pass upon the supposed conditions. The man is forced to submit to the effect because he is bound to the laws of nature that are imposed upon him. However, when God formulated the Universe, He could not have been in bondage to natural laws that did not even exist, and would not exist until He had freely designed and enforced them. So, for example, if a man were to cast a vase over

the edge of a cliff, he is bound to the consequence that the vase will shatter, but God was not bound to this consequence because it was in His power to alter the laws of motion and gravity.

The next article to be considered is in the fifth chapter of the Confession:

5.4 The Almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God, so far manifest themselves in His providence, that His determinate counsel extendeth itself even to the first fall, and all other sinful actions both of angels and men; and that not by a bare permission, which also He most wisely and powerfully boundeth, and otherwise ordereth and governeth, in a manifold dispensation to His most holy ends; yet so, as the sinfulness of their acts proceedeth only from the creatures, and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin.

This article has provoked objections from some because it asserts that the relationship of God's providence to sin is not one of "bare permission." Yet the article asserts no more than what is implied by what even the objectors believe about God. Further, the claims of the article are necessitated by numerous scriptural statements.

Such statement include: 1) The claim that Satan moved David to number Israel (1Chron 21:1), yet it elsewhere says God moved David to do it (2Sam 2:24). 2) The claim that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh (Ex 7:13), but it elsewhere says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Ex 8:32). 3) The claim that God sent lying spirits into the mouths of Ahab's prophets (1Ki 22:23), but we are also told that God cannot be tempted with evil, neither does He tempt any man (Js 1:13). 4) The claim that wicked men at Calvary were gathered to do what God's hand and counsel had determined before to be done (Acts 4:28); however, the same text says they were there acting "against" the Lord. 5) The claim that the Lord destroyed Job (Job 2:3), but that book elsewhere describes the Devil as doing it of his own accord. 6) Isaiah's claim that the Lord had "made" Israel to err from His ways (Isa 63:17), yet the entire tenor of the Bible condemns the idea that God is culpable for any man's error.

These statements are all true, being found in God's inerrant word, and they are all reconcilable. However, many men make little effort to do this, choosing rather to ignore those parts conflicting with their personal theories while emphasizing those parts they think to be in their support. These statements also show that God's relationship to the described events was not one of *bare* permission, even though permission surely played a crucial part.

To understand these statements, and the statement of the Confession, it must be considered that while God is righteous in all He does, this does not imply that men and devils will be righteous as the result. In fact exactly the opposite is the case. When I say God is righteous, I do not mean in an arbitrary, self-fulfilling sense, but in a definitive sense. Peter commands us, "*But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation,*" (1Pet 1:15). This commandment would mean nothing if God were not holy in some definitive way. Yet that very holiness provokes much wickedness in this world through the reactions of depraved men. The Lord Jesus said, "*If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin...*" (Jn 15:24). Hence, their sin was the result of His actions, yet they did it, not being forced or constrained by those actions, but in free rebellion against them, being provoked by their holy character. So there is a sense in which it could be said that Jesus "made" them to sin,

even as Isaiah claimed the Lord had “made” Israel to err, but this does not imply that they were seduced, much less that they were constrained or compelled. Accordingly, one preacher, upon delivering a great sermon, might “make” another preacher jealous, but this does not cause the first preacher to be culpable, nor does it condemn his actions in any respect.

Once this fact is understood, those seemingly contradictory scriptures mentioned earlier are not only reconciled, but they become necessary and expected. The reason is that God could never be expected to refrain from His holy character and works simply because wicked men would be the wickedder for it. Yet God, being well aware of what their reactions will be, administers His goodness in a precisely calculated way so that these wicked reactions will be overruled, thus foiling the designs of their perpetrators, and establishing the righteous designs of God. Now in all such things, God is entirely righteous, but He is not entirely permissive, because the wicked reactions here described are occasioned by His own holy works.

The following illustration should prove useful toward explaining this part of the Confession: Two preachers are visiting in the churchyard. A kind, charitable deacon walks up to one preacher and hands him a hundred dollar bill. The second preacher is filled with envy, and in his jealousy he thereafter seeks to undermine the first preacher. Now as a common manner of speaking, we might say the deacon “made” the second preacher envious, or even “caused” the preacher to be envious, or that his actions “hardened the heart” of the preacher, or that his actions caused an “evil spirit” to possess the preacher. Yet it is clear that the deacon acted righteously and with righteous motives. It is also clear that the deacon did nothing to necessitate the actions of the second preacher. He did not offer violence to his will, nor deprive him of his liberty, nor take away the contingency presented to his mind when he chose to react in an evil way. The deacon did nothing but good and the preacher is fully and unambiguously culpable for his evil.

Accordingly, all that God does is good. His sovereignty must never be taught so as to compromise His holiness, nor should His holiness be taught so as to compromise His sovereignty. But men react to the goodness of God in evil ways. This does not make God the author of their sin any more than the deacon was the author of the preacher’s sin. Man is so utterly depraved that any good thing God might choose to do will surely incite some wicked reaction from man. Should God then do nothing? If so, then all hope for man is lost. Nor can it be expected of God to administer His goodness and then, as though in afterthought, frantically repair the mess that men will make of it. Instead, the administration of His goodness is precisely calculated in His infinite wisdom such that all consequences of it, both good and evil, will fulfill His righteous purposes. These purposes include the salvation of His people and the destruction of the wicked. A classic scriptural case of this is described in:

The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. – Acts 4:26-28

God in His greatest act of goodness sent Jesus into the world while knowing that wicked men would seek His destruction even from birth. God gave words of truth for Jesus to speak, and these words included righteous denunciations of man’s corruption and of the apostate religion of the Jews. These righteous acts of divine intervention were purposed and planned while knowing

that both good and evil consequences would follow, and these divine acts were precisely calculated so that all their consequences would work to accomplish God's righteous objectives, namely, the salvation of His people and the overthrow of Satan's wicked empire.

When the Confession states that God's determinate counsel extends even to the wicked actions of angels and men, and not by "bare permission," it does not imply that God is in any respect culpable for their sin. Instead, the article is acknowledging that wicked actions of men and angels are in reaction to His righteous acts of intervention, and that He therefore has more than a barely permissive relationship. So the deacon in my example did not have a barely permissive relationship to the sin of the second preacher, because the righteous action of one led to the sin of the other. A scriptural example can be seen where Jesus said, "*If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin...*" (John 15:24). Hence, the sinful acts of the wicked Jews were the result of the righteous acts of Christ, and Christ knew this would be so before He ever acted. Christ was not an indifferent spectator to their wickedness, and His role was not barely permissive. Accordingly, when the brethren of Joseph committed their wicked actions against him (Gn 37), God was not barely permissive, because these brethren were reacting in evil ways to what God had already done, namely, in conferring favor upon Joseph and blessing him with dreams concerning the future. These acts of divine intervention were done while knowing that evil consequences would follow, and these consequences were used to fulfill the divine purpose. Yet God was righteous in all He did, and Joseph's brethren were as culpable for their actions as the jealous preacher in my example. So the Confession is acknowledging that "permit" is an approximate term in some respects, but it is entirely accurate in its implication that men and devils are culpable for their sin.

The 1689 London Confession was largely based on the Westminster Confession. The latter is commonly considered a Presbyterian document, though it was in fact written by men from several denominations. The Baptists of course modified the Westminster on points of difference. On the subject of decrees, a few modifications were made. The most significant of these was in Article 3.3 where the Westminster had said the nonelect were "foreordained to everlasting death." The Baptists changed this to say, "left to act in their sin to their just condemnation." By this change they clearly intended to endorse preterition and deny reprobation.

What the 1646 London Baptist Confession said on this subject was brief but well-stated. One must assume the later Confession intended the same ideas. The former stated in its third article that God had decreed "concerning" all things. This differs from the 1689 Confession which simply said God had decreed all things. Though either statement comments on the other, the earlier Confession accommodates permissive decrees in a more obvious way. Another interesting aspect of the 1646 Confession is a statement made in its Appendix commenting on this article:

Although all the power of the creature to act be from the Creator, and there is a providence of God always extended to every creature, and to every action of the creature; yet we judge that the final corruption of the creature, and the sinfulness of the creature's action, is from the creature, and not from God: and that it is a great sin to say that God is the author of sin, Eccles. 7:29; Hab. 1:13; James 1:13,14,15; 1 Cor.14:33; 1 John 2:16.

As touching that place which is here objected against us, viz., Amos 3:6, “Shall there be evil in a city, etc..” we conceive that it is either to be rendered according to the last translation in the margin, “Shall there be evil in a city, and shall not the Lord do somewhat?” or else that it is to be understood only of the evil of punishment, and not of the evil of sin.

This statement gives the impression that the Baptists were defending themselves, not for saying God is the author of sin, but for insisting He is not. Apparently, their doctrine was clear about this matter – too clear for someone. The 1689 Confession surely had the same intents.

There is one point where the Fulton brethren seem to have misinterpreted the 1689 Confession, and, ironically, it was a point that could have served to their advantage. It occurs in the chapter on free will, where the first three articles state:

9.1 God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty and power of acting upon choice, that it is neither forced, nor by any necessity of nature determined to do good or evil.

9.2. 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 was unstable, so that he might fall from it.

9.3. 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.

The Fulton Confession placed a footnote on the first of these articles stating, “This section has reference alone to Adam in a state of innocence.” This indeed appears to be in line with the progression of thought in the chapter. But the scriptural references provided by the 1689 Confession were: Mt 17:12, Jas 1:14 and Dt 30:19. These show the article had reference to man even after the fall. The intent of the article was likely to define what “free will” means. It means “neither forced, nor by any necessity of nature determined to do good or evil.” By “nature” it probably referred to the natural environment about the man, not to his psychology, though I suspect the Fulton brethren took it to mean the latter. I have quoted the next two articles partly because they corroborate my interpretation. The first article probably intended to say “free will” means “not determined by natural factors outside of self” or simply “self-determined.” The Confession obviously does not support Determinism.

I should mention that these two interpretations of the word “nature” have identical implications under Determinism. If the will derives deterministically from a static psychological nature, then all variation in thought and behavior must be owing to variation in the natural environment. So to say a man is driven entirely by his psychological nature would be the same as saying he is driven by his natural environment. On the other hand, if the will has a degree of self-determination, then thought and behavior cannot be entirely explained by either a static psychological nature or by the natural environment.

The third article explains that fallen man has no capacity to will that which is “spiritually” good. The Confession is not denying his ability to comply with a commandment of the Law, but it is denying his ability to do it with “spiritual” motives. “*Whatsoever is not of faith is sin,*” (Rom 14:23). So when it stated earlier that the human will is “neither forced, nor by any necessity of

nature determined to do good or evil,” it was affirming that, while fallen man has a wicked nature, this alone does not render him incapable of outward compliance to a commandment of the Law. If he is culpable for his wickedness, then he could have chosen to do better. His problem is that his wicked nature dictates that he will never obey with proper motives. Any man can eat a chitterling, but few men can do it and like it. Even so, a natural man can choose to obey God, but he will never do it because he loves God or his Law.

While the 1689 London Confession has been controversial, most objections have derived from misunderstanding of its intents by those who hastily drew conclusions concerning it. This document is a classic example of how heated conflict can be spawned by mere miscommunication, and it shows the importance of clearly expressing ourselves, and the importance of sincerely striving to understand other men before answering them. *“He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him,”* (Prov 18:13).

The Fulton Appendix

The following was extracted from the Appendix of the 1900 Fulton Confession of Faith of Primitive Baptists. I think it exactly expresses the views I have presented in the previous sections. I present it here without comment:

We do not believe that God has unconditionally, unlimitedly, and equally predestinated righteousness and unrighteousness. It is our belief that God has positively and effectually predestinated the eternal salvation of his people which were chosen in Christ before time.

God’s purpose concerning sin does not sustain the same relation to sin that it does to holiness. While we think that God’s purpose concerning sin is more than barely permissive, it is such as to exclude all chance and uncertainty, yet we hold that God is in no sense the cause of sin.

We do not believe that God requires or forbids anything in his law, and then by a power irresistible moves his creatures to act contrary to his commands. In Chapter III., Section 1, of the London Confession, we read: “God hath decreed in himself from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably, all things whatsoever come to pass; yet so as thereby God is neither the author of sin, nor hath fellowship with any therein, nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor yet is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away,” etc.

In this they deny that God’s attitude to sin is causative, and in the body of this Confession we insist that they maintain that God’s attitude to holiness is causative. So they clearly distinguish between God’s efficacious decree of holiness and his purpose concerning sin. Section 2: “Although God knoweth 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.” Here, they distinguish between the knowledge of God as an attribute of God and the decree of God as an act of God, which we believe to be scriptural.

For God to foresee that man will yield to influences of a secondary nature does not imply that God moves man to sin, but only that he is the Permitter of sin. Webster defines “permit,” “to suffer, without giving authority.” We use it in the sense of “not hinder.” In Section 3 they say: “Others being left to act in their sins to their just condemnation, to the praise of his glorious justice.” If they had believed that God moves men to sin, they would not have said, “being left to

act in their sins,” etc. We insist that we should not use language implying that God’s attitude to sin is the same as his attitude to holiness, for this tends to destroy the distinction between right and wrong. The expression, “unlimited predestination of all things,” seems to convey the idea that God’s purpose concerning sin is as unlimited and as unrestricted as it is concerning holiness; and if so, then God’s decree concerning sin would be causative, since it is causative concerning holiness, and this view would destroy all distinction between right and wrong. Chapter XVI., Section 2: “These good works, done in obedience to God’s commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith; and by them believers manifest their thankfulness, strengthen their assurance, edify their brethren, adorn the profession of the gospel, stop the mouths of the adversaries, and glorify God,” etc.

Section 3: “Their ability to do good works is not at all of themselves, but wholly from the Spirit of Christ; and that they may be enabled thereto, besides the graces they have already received, there is necessary an actual influence of the same Holy Spirit to work in them to will and to do of his good pleasure; yet are they not hereupon to grow negligent, as if they were not bound to perform any duty unless upon a special motion of the Spirit,” etc. They do neglect, not being forced in duty irresistibly.

We believe the Scriptures teach that there is a time salvation received by the heirs of God distinct from eternal salvation, which does depend upon their obedience. The people of God receive their rewards for obedience in this life only. We believe that the ability of the Christian is the unconditional gift of God.

Besides the efficacious grace of God in the heart in regeneration, we need the company of God’s Holy Spirit to comfort, lead, and bless us, which he has promised to give to every one that will ask him. (Luke 11:13.) The act of God necessary to our regeneration must in some sense be distinguished from his act necessary to our obedience. We are never commanded to be born again, but in hundreds of places we are called on to obey. We are passive in regeneration, but in obedience we are active. Regeneration is neither a vice nor a virtue; obedience is a virtue and disobedience a vice. Regeneration is wholly independent of the will. There could be no such a thing as obedience or disobedience independent of the will. Men do not neglect to be born again, but they do neglect their duty.

In section 5, Chapter XVI., we read: “We cannot by our best of works merit pardon of sin, or eternal life, at the hand of God,” etc. They did not place obedience in the place of Christ, or his atonement, and so we believe it would be exceeding sinful to mention good works as essential to these ends, yet we believe there is an important use for good works aside from these ends. In Section 2, same chapter, they say of good works: “By them believers manifest their thankfulness, strengthen their assurance, edify their brethren, adorn the profession of the gospel, stop the mouths of the adversaries,” etc.

We think these uses of good works scriptural. We hold that God’s government of his people is moral. We hold, too, that conditionality is an essential element of moral government. We distinguish between God’s government of mind and his government of matter.

Infralapsarianism and Supralapsarianism

Primitive Baptists almost unanimously tend toward the *infralapsarian* (or *sublapsarian*) view of election and predestination. This is also true of the vast majority of Calvinists. However, the *supralapsarian* position has sufficient acceptance among modern Calvinists to warrant our consideration of the issue. In this section I will show that the infralapsarian view has been the generally accepted position of historical Baptists and Protestants. I will give their reasons why. Then I will offer my own views on this subject.

A.A. Hodge in his Outlines of Theology (pp 231,232) sets forth the definitions for these two views of predestination:

What is the infralapsarian view of predestination?

The infralapsarian theory of predestination, or the decree of predestination viewed as subsequent in purpose to the decree permitting the fall, represents man as created and fallen as the object of election. The order of the decrees then stand thus: 1st. To create man. 2d. To permit man to fall. 3d. The decree to elect certain men, out of the mass of the fallen and justly condemned race, to eternal life, and to pass others by, leaving them to the just consequences of their sins. 4th. The decree to provide salvation for the elect.

This is the common view of the reformed churches, confirmed alike by the Synod of Dort and the Westminster Assembly.

What is the supralapsarian theory of predestination?

The term supralapsarian designates that view of the various provisions of the divine decree in their logical relations which supposes that the ultimate end with which God proposed to himself was his own glory in the salvation of some men and in the damnation of others, and that, as a means to that end, he decreed to create man, and to permit him to fall. According to this view, man simply as creatable, and fallible, and not as actually created or fallen, is the object of election and reprobation. The order of the decrees would then be – 1st. Of all possible men, God first decreed the salvation of some and the damnation of others, for the end of his glory. 2d. He decreed, as a means to that end, to create those already elected or reprobated. 3d. He decreed to permit them fall. 4th. He decreed to provide a salvation for the elect. This view was held by Beza, the successor of Calvin in Geneva, and by Gomarus, the great opponent of Arminius...

The supralapsarian scheme makes the decree to elect some and reprobate others, precede the decree to create and to permit the fall. The infralapsarian view makes the decree of election come after the decree to create and permit to fall. The supralapsarian view regards man not as created and fallen, but simply as creatable, the object of election and reprobation. The infralapsarian view makes man as already created and fallen the only object of those decrees.

The infralapsarian position is often stated by saying that God elected a people from the fallen mass of humanity and *left all others to their just condemnation*. The act of leaving the nonelect in their fallen state is called “preterition.” The supralapsarian view claims that the cases of the elect and nonelect are exactly symmetrical. Both were conceived in the mind of God for their ultimate end. The nonelect were conceived for the very purpose of being damned, and they were

then created to this end. This is commonly called “reprobation.” The elect were conceived for the very purpose of being saved, and they were then created to this end. As Hodge said, the essential difference between the two schemes is in the logical ordering of purposes in the mind of God. The difference is logical, not chronological. Infralapsarianism says election logically follows creation and the fall. Supralapsarianism says election logically precedes.

Both views engage in the precarious business of attempting to read the mind of God. Both views also contemplate the divine mind as thinking in a simplistic, stepwise manner, even as a man tends to think. The issue concerns the order in which two thoughts passed through the mind of God. It is simplistic to suppose that God entertained one thought without the other being in His infinite mind. When a man solves a problem, he must work through various steps of reason to arrive at his conclusion. On the other hand, God knows the end from the beginning (Is 46:10). Because the divine mind is too complex for human minds to comprehend, an approximation is sought that the human mind can grasp. One approximation is infralapsarianism. The other is supralapsarianism. The question then becomes which model is the best approximation to what the scriptures have revealed.

None should question the right of God to implement either scheme. God has the right to make man for no other purpose than to destroy him, even as a man has a right to make a firecracker for no other purpose than to explode it. The question does not concern what God had a right to do, but what He actually did, as taught in the scriptures.

The infralapsarian view is clearly favored in the 1689 London Confession. As related before, this Confession was derived from the Westminster Confession, generally considered to be a Presbyterian document. For the most part, the Baptists accepted the language of the Westminster without modification. The most telling parts of the Baptist Confession are the few places where they felt it necessary to modify Westminster language. The Westminster, as Hodge said, was itself infralapsarian. But the Baptists apparently felt it was not sufficiently clear on this point, so they modified it to eliminate any ambiguity. Consider the corresponding articles in the two confessions:

Westminster – 3.3. By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestined unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death.

Baptist – 3.3. By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestined, or foreordained to eternal life through Jesus Christ, to the praise of His glorious grace; others being left to act in their sin to their just condemnation, to the praise of His glorious justice.

This modification very clearly conveys Baptist sentiment on the subject. The wicked, they said, were “left to act in their sins to their just condemnation.” This is the explanation offered by nearly all Primitive Baptists today. Next, consider another article in the same chapter of the Westminster. This article was omitted altogether in the Baptist Confession:

Westminster – 3.7. 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.

John Gill is generally considered supralapsarian because of various statements in his commentary. Yet this is apparently another point where he is either misunderstood or else he modified his position later in life. This can be seen in:

Dr. Twiss, who was as great a supralapsarian as perhaps ever was, and carried things as high as any man ever did, and as closely studied the point, and as well understood it, and perhaps better than any one did, and yet he confesses that it was only *apex logicus*, a point in logic; and that the difference only lay in the ordering and ranging the decrees of God and, for my own part, I think both may be taken in; that in the decree of the end, the ultimate end, the glory of God, for which he does all things, men might be considered in the divine mind as creable, not yet created and fallen; and that in the decree of the means, which, among other things, takes in the mediation of Christ, redemption by him, and the sanctification of the Spirit; they might be considered as created, fallen, and sinful, which these things imply; nor does this suppose separate acts and decrees in God, or any priority and posteriority in them; which in God are but one and together; but our finite minds are obliged to consider them one after another, not being able to take them in together and at once. – (John Gill, “Body of Divinity,” p 185.)

Gill, upon recognizing that neither view can be exactly correct, assimilated both, but definitely seems to lean toward the infralapsarian idea in this statement.

The Mississippi Baptist Association, constituted in 1807 on the 1689 London Confession, stated the following in their Circular Letter of 1845:

It is believed by some, that if the election is true, the doctrine of eternal reprobation is also true; but this by no means follows. We make no remarks on this doctrine, because we find no such doctrine in the Bible. We leave those who charge us with preaching that doctrine to give an account to God, of graces bestowed upon us in a holy calling, regeneration, sanctification and justification.

Arminians commonly attempt to discredit the doctrines of grace by misrepresenting them as teaching supralapsarianism. The previous quote was likely intended as a reply to such. The quote expresses a typical Primitive Baptist position. This statement conveys a strong conviction on the subject, and this is typical of Primitive Baptists also. However, Sylvester Hassell, while being infralapsarian himself, commended certain historic confessions for avoiding the issue and being “wisely silent concerning the decree of reprobation, leaving that to theological science and private opinion,” (p 496) though he then explained, “All Calvinistic Confessions, without exception, trace the fall to a permissive decree, make man responsible and justly punishable for sin, and reject, as a blasphemous slander, the charge that God is the author of sin.” By this he was referring to the fact that even supralapsarian Calvinists have historically denied that their doctrine impugned God as being the author of sin, and they considered such a notion as blatant heresy. Hassell seemed disposed to tolerate supralapsarianism provided it made this disclaimer. He likely would not have countenanced anyone who became troublesome or divisive with it.

All systematic theologians I have consulted reject the supralapsarian view. These include: Augustus Strong, Charles Hodge, A.A. Hodge, R.L. Dabney, W.G.T. Shedd, J. Oliver Buswell,

L. Berkhof and Emery H. Bancroft. This list could also include John Gill. A.A. Hodge (p 233) voiced these objections against supralapsarianism:

1st. Man creatable is a nonentity. He could not have been loved or chosen unless considered as created.

2d. The whole language of Scripture upon this subject implies that the “elect” are chosen as the objects of eternal love, not from the number of creatable, but from the mass of actually sinful men. – John xv. 19; Rom. xi. 5,7.

3d. The Scriptures declare that the elect are chosen to sanctification, and to the sprinkling of the blood of Christ. They must therefore have been regarded when chosen as guilty and defiled by sin. – 1 Pet. i. 2; Eph. i. 4-6.

4th. Predestination includes reprobation. This view represents God as reprobating the non-elect by a sovereign act, without any respect to their sins, simply for his own glory. This appears to be inconsistent with the divine righteousness, as well as with the teaching of Scripture. The non-elect are “ordained to dishonor and wrath ‘for their sins,’ to the praise of his glorious justice.” – “Conf. Faith,” ch. 3, sec. 3-7, “L. Cat.,” question 13; “S. Cat.,” question 20.

Charles Dabney’s comments are especially insightful (p 233):

In my opinion this is a question which never ought to have been raised. Both schemes are illogical and contradictory to the true state of facts. But the Sublapsarian (i.e. infralapsarian) is far more Scriptural in its tendencies, and its general spirit far more honourable to God. The Supralapsarian, under a pretense of greater symmetry, is in reality the more illogical of the two, and misrepresents the divine character and the facts of Scripture in a repulsive manner. The view from which it starts, that the ultimate end must be first in design, and then the intermediate means, is of force only with reference to a finite mind. God’s decree has no succession; and to Him no successive order of parts; because it is a cotemporaneous unit, comprehended altogether, by one infinite intuition. In this thing, the statements of both parties are untrue to God’s thought. The true statement of the matter is, that in this co-etaneous, unit plan, one part of the plan is devised by God with reference to a state of facts which He intended to result from another part of the plan; but all parts equally present, and all equally primary to His mind. As to the decree to create man, to permit his fall, to elect some to life; neither part preceded any other part with God; but His purpose to elect had reference to a state of facts which was to result from His purpose to create, and permit the fall. It does not seem to me that the Sublapsarian scheme makes the decree conditional. True, one result decreed is dependent on another result decreed; but this is totally another thing. No scheme can avoid this, not even the Supralapsarian, unless it does away with all agency except God’s, and makes Him the direct author of sin.

But we object more particularly to the Supralapsarian scheme.

(a) That it is erroneous in representing God as having before His mind, as the objects of predestination, men conceived *in posse* only; and in making creation a means of their salvation or damnation. Whereas, an object must be conceived as existing, in order to have its destiny given to it. And creation can with no propriety be called a means for effectuating a decree of predestination as to creatures. It is rather a prerequisite of such decree.

(b) It contradicts Scripture, which teaches us that God chose His elect “out of the world,” Jno. xv 19, and out of the “same lump” with the vessels of dishonour, Rom. ix 21. They were then regarded as being, along with the non-elect, in the common state of sin and misery.

(c) Our election is in Christ our Redeemer, Eph. i 4; iii 11, which clearly shows that we are conceived as being fallen, and in need of a Redeemer, in this act. And, moreover, our election is an election to the exercise of saving graces to be wrought in us by Christ, 1 Pet. i 2; 2 Thess. ii 13.

(d) Election is declared to be an act of mercy Rom. ix 15, 16; xi 5, 6, and preterition is an act of justice, Rom. ix 22. Now as mercy and goodness imply an apprehension of guilt and misery in their object, so justice implies ill-desert. This shows that man is predestinated as fallen; and is not permitted to fall because predestinated. I will conclude this part, by repeating the language of Turretin, Loc. 4, Qu. 18, 5.

1. "By this hypothesis, the first act of God's will towards some of His creatures is conceived to be an act of hatred, in so far as He willed to demonstrate His righteousness in their damnation, and indeed before they were considered as in sin, and consequently before they were deserving of hatred; nay, while they were conceived as still innocent, and so rather the objects of love. This does not seem compatible with God's ineffable goodness.

2. "It is likewise harsh that, according to this scheme, God is supposed to have imparted to them far the greatest effects of love, out of a principle of hatred, in that He determines to create them in a state of integrity to this end, that He may illustrate His righteousness in their damnation. This seems to express Him neither as supremely good nor as supremely wise and just.

3. "It is erroneously supposed that God exercised an act of mercy and justice towards His creatures in His foreordination of their salvation and destruction, in that they are conceived as neither wretched, nor even existing as yet. But since those virtues (mercy and justice) are relative, they pre-suppose their object, do not make it.

4. "It is also asserted without warrant, that creation and the fall are means of election and reprobation, since they are antecedent to them: else sin would be on account of damnation, whereas damnation is on account of sin; and God would be said to have created men that He might destroy them."

I will now offer some of my own scriptural arguments against supralapsarianism. Some of these overlap the arguments of the theologians just quoted.

1) Supralapsarianism has logical appeal in that it is symmetrical. The problem is that asymmetry is almost everywhere in the Bible. People are damned because of what they do, but they are not saved because of what they do. This is the repeated message of the Bible. The Bible says people are saved by grace but damned by sin. The intuitive interpretation of this is that the root source of salvation is grace and the root source of damnation is sin. But supralapsarianism says, "Thy simplicity in Christ hath deceived thee," and presumes to enlighten by explaining that, on the damnation side of the question, the Bible is somewhat misleading, and the actual truth is that the root source of damnation is in God, in the same sense in which salvation is in God, and sin, it says, is at most the channel through which God carried out His purpose to damn. Accordingly, the simple theme of the Bible is that a gracious God has saved us from our sins, but when supralapsarianism is carried to its logical conclusion, one would have to say that God really saved us from Himself. Now any doctrine must be held in suspicion when it claims wisdom above the intuitive interpretation of the Bible. "*For vain man would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass's colt,*" (Job 11:12).

2) This asymmetry can be seen not only in root causes of salvation and damnation, but also in descriptions of divine intent concerning them. Hence, Christ says to the sheep, "*Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,*" (Mt 25:34), but to the goats He says, "*Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels,*" (vs 41). The kingdom was described as being "prepared" for the sheep, but the everlasting fire was not described as being prepared for the goats; rather, it was for

the devil and his angels. The preparation for the sheep was “*from the foundation of the world,*” but such is not said of the case of the goats. The same asymmetry can be seen in:

Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? 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. – Rom 9:21-23

The wording pertaining to one act is not the same as for the other. The vessels of mercy were “*afore prepared unto glory,*” but the vessels of dishonor were “*fitted to destruction.*” There was an eternal intent on the part of the former to transfer it from a dishonorable state (i.e. the lump) to an honorable state. There was no such intent for the latter. Hence, the destiny of one is traced back to intent, whereas the destiny of the other is not. Both were contemplated in dishonor when the intent was conceived to transfer one to honor while leaving the other in dishonor, though the form of this dishonor would be changed.

3) The very fact the Bible describes the saved as “elect” or “chosen” conveys the idea of infralapsarianism. Choice presupposes the existence in concept of that which is to be chosen and that which is to be rejected. There can be no choice unless alternatives are in view. The supralapsarian scheme does not truly involve election; rather, it has one group of people being conceived for the purpose of salvation, and another people being conceived for the purpose of damnation. They were either saved or damned from the very blueprints. This is “design” and not “election.”

4) The Bible places foreknowledge before predestination. Such would be an impossible ordering under the supralapsarian scheme. Consider:

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called and whom he called, them he also justified and whom he justified, them he also glorified. – Rom 8:29-30

This text implies infralapsarianism because it has God determining the salvation of a foreknown people. If they were foreknown, then they must have been contemplated as created; hence, the purpose to save logically follows the purpose to create. But the supralapsarian view has the purpose to save preceding the purpose to create. The elect were actually created for the purpose of saving. The text also has them being objects of salvation because they were loved (i.e. foreknown), but the supralapsarian view has them being loved because they were objects of salvation. If this view were correct, then the text should have read, “For whom he did predestinate, them he also did foreknow...”

5) The Bible places foreknowledge before election. This also would be an impossible ordering under supralapsarianism. Consider:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father,

*through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ
Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. – 1Pet 1:1-2*

Observe they were “*elect according to the foreknowledge of God.*” They were not foreknown according to the election of God, as the supralapsarian model would require. Again, under the infralapsarian model, God chose a people because He loved them, whereas under the supralapsarian model, God loved a people because He designed them to that end.

6) Nothing created can be the author of any objective motivating its creation, nor of anything necessarily associated with that objective. The creator is obviously the author of all these things. If God’s objective in creation was damnation, and if sin is necessarily associated with damnation, then God is the author of sin. The only way the supralapsarian can avoid this conclusion, and make man the author of his own sin, is to disassociate sin from damnation. If the decree of God concerning sin is truly permissive, as most supralapsarians claim, then sin must merely be coincidental to damnation. That is, man would have been damned with or without consideration to sin. This is contradicted by the entire tenor of scripture.

7) The Bible affirms that man was created in the very image of God (Gn 1:26, 9:6). While man has since fallen from this (Rom 1:23), supralapsarianism has him being damned logically before the fall. So it has God creating something in His own image for the purpose of destroying it. This is a monstrous claim.

I will now consider scriptures that are commonly adduced as proof of supralapsarianism:

Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? 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. – Rom 9:21-23

The usual supralapsarian application of this text presumes the clay to represent the physical matter from which men are made. But Paul is here adapting the language of Is 64:8 where the prophet said, “...*we are the clay, and thou our potter...*” Isaiah did not say we are the honorable and dishonorable vessels; rather, “*we are the clay.*” That is, the clay itself represents the fallen mass of humanity. This being the case, the text would not support the supralapsarian theory, because it describes a process subsequent to the creation and fall of man. The next text is:

For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. – Jude 4

It will be claimed that the words “*ordained to this condemnation*” imply the supralapsarian view. This reasoning fails because the Greek word for “ordained” is *prographo*, which means “wrote afore” or “written aforetime,” and is so translated in Rom 15:4 and Eph 3:3. The meaning of the text is that these men were prophesied to commit their wicked acts. The specific prophecy under consideration is likely Dt 31:29. The fact that prophecy is meant is indicated by the words “of old” which fall short of suggesting eternity past, and the underlying Greek (*palai*) is never so

used in the Bible. Besides, the infralapsarian view does not deny that the condemnation of men was effectively sealed and ordained when God passed by them in the decree of election. What it denies is that this was done without consideration to their sin. This text speaks of “*ungodly men*” being ordained to condemnation, which describes how they were contemplated when ordained unto the end in view. The last text is:

Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. –
1Pet 2:6-9

Here the appointment of the wicked to stumble at the word will be advanced as proof of the supralapsarian model. But the meaning of the text is that the wicked Jews were appointed to stumble at the word on account of their disobedience. Jesus said, “*If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself,*” (Jn 7:17). It follows that if men are disobedient in following what light they have, they will not know the doctrine; rather, God has ordained such to blindness, hardness and a reprobate mind. An example of this is found in: “*And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient,*” (Rom 1:28). Thus, these were given over to a reprobate mind because of prior wickedness. The same can be seen in: “*...they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie,*” (2Thes 2:10-11). Again, the darkening of their minds was not arbitrary but was occasioned by their own corruption. Even so, when Peter spoke of an appointment to stumble at the word, this was not done without consideration to prior wickedness.

Notwithstanding these many arguments favoring infralapsarianism, the doctrine is impaired with a few significant shortcomings. For this reason, theologians have been cautious in their endorsement of it, admitting that the doctrine can be no more than an approximation to reality. The principal shortcoming of the doctrine is that it presents the love of God for His people as being an afterthought. It does not have God loving His people until they were seen as fallen in sin. It suggests that God viewed all men equally until they became sinners, then His perspective toward them suddenly and radically changed. He then dearly loved some but not others. These are dubious claims when applied to an immutable God. Our intuition says there never was a point, either in time or in logic, in which God did not love His people.

A second problem with infralapsarianism derives from the first: It makes God appear arbitrary in election. From all appearance, elect and non-elect were effectively determined by the toss of a coin. Advocates of infralapsarianism would deny that God was truly arbitrary, but would admit that nothing in their doctrine could account for His choice. They are content to dismiss this question to mystery, and in this they may indeed be correct. However, when the purpose is to weight infralapsarianism against supralapsarianism, we cannot ignore the fact that the latter

largely averts these particular problems. Under this scheme, the elect were loved and chosen because they were conceived in the mind of God unto these very ends.

These are serious shortcomings with the infralapsarian formulation, and it has been my personal suspicion that dubious doctrines like eternal vital union and eternal two-seedism may have been misguided attempts to patch these deficiencies. The better solution to the dilemma is to do as Gill suggested when he claimed both doctrines could be “taken in.” The supralapsarian scheme seems to be the better explanation as to God’s dealings with the elect, but it becomes most odious in its explanations as to God’s dealings with the nonelect. The infralapsarian does the opposite, being more plausible in the case of the nonelect, but deficient in its explanations as to the elect. So a more reasonable course seems to be one which adopts the better parts of both doctrines and dispenses with the worst. This would lead to the following formulation:

- 1) In the original purpose to create men, a definite number were given by the Father to the Son to be His eternal possession. These were to be His possession with or without sin.
- 2) Both these and all other men were to be created in innocence but vulnerable to fall.
- 3) Upon seeing the entire race would fall together, those possessed by the Son were chosen or elected for redemption. Under this interpretation, when the Eph 1:4 speaks of people being chosen “*in Him*,” this does not mean they were chosen *to be* in Him, but chosen because they *were* in Him, not in any vital sense, but in a legal sense, being His eternal possession from the outset of the plan. Hence, the elect were not loved and chosen to be the possession of Christ; rather, they were loved and chosen on that account.
- 4) As for the non-elect, these were left to their just condemnation in exact accordance to the claims of the infralapsarian plan.

Examination of the Old “Absoluters”

A small faction of Primitive Baptists have been labeled “Absoluters” because of their belief in the “absolute predestination of all things.” If true, this claim would of course imply that God had predestined even the sinful actions of men, though their exact intent with the word “predestined” is not always made clear. The term “Absolutism” has been used by Primitive Baptists to refer to any doctrine implying that God is the author of sin, including especially the doctrine of Determinism. Rarely has anyone been so foolish and brazen as to explicitly call God the author of sin; however, the Absoluters have sometimes advanced notions that seemed to add up to such conclusions. Likely some were truly guilty of this charge whereas others were misinterpreted.

In this section I will show that the original Absoluters surely did not believe in Determinism, nor did they claim God to be the author of sin, nor did they teach a doctrine implying such. Their meaning was really the same as what had been expressed in the London Confession, but their terminology was different, and I think for the worse. Because of this poor terminology, both opponents and proponents of the original Absoluters have misunderstood their views. The quotes of this section should be sufficient to show that the original Absoluters would not endorse Absolutism as it has been advocated by some since their times. Therefore, they were not truly “Absoluters” under the definitions here given. It is unfortunate that these early Primitive Baptists, and possibly others, have been misunderstood. This section is intended to corroborate the following statement by Sylvester Hassell in 1895:

In Vol. 2, No. 3 pages 33-35, Elder Samuel Trott (the most scholarly and able of all the early contributors to the *Signs*) says what I have often stated, with both my tongue and pen, that the literal meaning of the Greek word, *pro-orizo*, which is translated *predestinate* in the King James version, is to *fore-bound, fore-limit*; and, in accordance with this true meaning of the word, he gives the most able, correct, and unobjectionable statement of the doctrine of the “Absolute Predestination of All Things” that I have ever seen... If those who maintain the doctrine of the “Absolute Predestination of All Things” had always confined themselves to these original scriptural statements of the original advocates of that doctrine, there never would have been the confusion and division that have arisen among Primitive Baptists on this subject. Only by a return to the original scriptural ground can there be a return to gospel fellowship and union. – (“My Six Weeks Tour to the Northeast,” Zions Advocate, Feb 1895)

Though all things are certain in the foreknowledge of God, and though He has decreed to cause or permit all things that come to pass – as explained by the Fulton Confession and the Baptist Confessions that preceded it – the term “predestined” has generally been used in a limited sense by both Baptists and Calvinists. The Westminster Confession along with its accompanying Larger and Shorter Catechisms applied the term only to divine acts of redemption. The same may be said of 1689 London Baptist Confession. This is also the way the term is used in the King James Bible. When the Absoluters began to apply it to *all* things, controversy was the immediate effect, though it did not become significant until the close of the 19th century. The 1900 Fulton Confession addressed the issue in its Appendix saying:

We insist that we should not use language implying that God’s attitude to sin is the same as his attitude to holiness, for this tends to destroy the distinction between right and wrong. The expression, “unlimited predestination of all things,” seems to convey the idea that God’s purpose concerning sin is as unlimited and as unrestricted as it is concerning holiness; and if so, then God’s decree concerning sin would be causative, since it is causative concerning holiness, and this view would destroy all distinction between right and wrong.

Most Calvinists can appreciate what is stated here. Though Calvinists claim God has “decreed” or “foreordained” all things, yet they say some things are effected by permission and others by causation. Both agree that a term must be reserved to distinguish causative acts of God from all others. The chosen term has traditionally been “predestined,” though it has not been used with complete consistency. It has been commonly used in reference to either:

- 1) Acts of God concerning redemption.
- 2) All unconditional acts of God, or all acts done without consideration to human will.
- 3) All acts of God whatsoever.

The first definition is the least controversial as it uses the term exactly as applied in the King James Bible. The second definition adds such things as the creation of the world and events deriving deterministically from its natural laws. But this is the most nebulous of the three definitions because not everyone will have the same concept as to the term *unconditional*. Some will take it to mean “without consideration to human will,” whereas others may take it to mean “without consideration to *cooperative* human will.” The third definition applies the term to *every* Divine act, but not to the freewill reactions of men to those acts. None of these definitions would apply “predestination” to the commission of sin.

James Oliphant, who was a leading author of the Fulton Confession, preferred the third definition (Autobiography, p 62). He did not approve application of the term to all things, but thought it proper to apply it to all things *done by God*. This is a very good definition, and can be defended on the basis of the following three questions:

- 1) Has God ever done anything He did not intend to do?
- 2) Has God ever failed to do anything He did intend to do?
- 3) If God ever intended to do a thing, then for how long has He intended to do it?

The answers are: God has never done anything He did not intend to do. He has never failed to do anything He did intend to do. And whatever He has intended to do, He has forever intended to do. “*Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world,*” (Acts 15:18). It follows that whatever God will do, He did forever intend to do, and whatever He has intended to do will most certainly be done; therefore, everything God does is predestined. Arminians will be hard-pressed to avoid this conclusion. It shows the absurdity of saying God saves sinners while denying that sinners were predestined to be saved. If those who shall be saved will indeed be saved by God, then logic demands that they were predestined by God to be saved.

The expression “absolute predestination of all things” appears to have been popularized by Samuel Trott (1783-1866) and Gilbert Beebe (1800-1881) in the early 1800s. Both men were significant figures in Primitive Baptist history. Trott was the primary author of the “Black Rock Address,” an important document in which Primitive Baptists took a stand in the controversy over Fullerism and Missionism. Beebe was the editor of a periodical called “Signs of the Times,” which was possibly the most widely distributed Primitive Baptist paper ever.

As stated earlier, they did not have a new doctrine, but had a new manner of expression. What they believed was apparently the same as what was presented in the London Confession. Though I cannot be certain as to their motivation for this shift in terms, there is some indication they did it to avoid the suggestion that God is the approver of sin. I will treat this shortly. It appears their new terminology was confusing from the outset and was the occasion of controversy, but it never led to division in their times because they clearly denied that God is the author of sin. The issue became much more divisive in subsequent generations.

Sylvester Hassell published his Church History in 1886 through Gilbert Beebe’s Sons Publishers. Beebe himself had died about five years earlier. At the end of his history, Hassell included an article by Gilbert Beebe entitled “Absolute Predestination of All Things.” He did this at the request of the publishers. In explaining the circumstances leading to the inclusion of the article, Hassell stated, “I am informed by Elder G. Beebe’s Sons that their father did not, neither do they, accept the use of the word ‘permission’ in reference to God’s decrees.” Obviously, none are now alive to explain the details of this statement by Beebe’s sons or the meaning of its terms; however, it is an outrageous statement if taken in the usual sense, and there is no wonder that such statements should be the occasion of controversy.

It is also a strange assertion, because I have reviewed five articles by Beebe on this subject, and two articles by Trott, and in all but one of them, they used the words “permit” or “allow” when

describing God's relationship to sin. I have found the same tendencies in their articles on other subjects. These men have frequently been blamed for originating a doctrine they never actually taught. The truth is they originated vulnerable terminology that was later misconstrued to support the heresy now known as "Absolutism."

In one article, when Trott was answering objections to his views, he stated:

Persons who make these objections to my views as published seem to overlook the fact that I speak of God's government in this case as being a predestination, or pre-determination, to permit such and such acts of depravity to take place, and to cause them to produce certain results, and to transpire under certain circumstances; and not a predestination to compel men to perform those acts. – ("Further Remarks Relative to Predestination," *Signs.*, vol 2, 1833)

Trott's concept of "predestination to permit" will seem strange to most Primitive Baptists today because they generally take "predestination" to be causative. As shown above, James Oliphant applied the term to all *action* of God, but Trott applied it even to *inaction* of God. Trott's meaning was acceptable though his terminology was strange. However, he gave his interesting perspective on this terminology in response to a Circular Letter of the Licking Association that had complained against his view:

I will here remark that the term *decree*, *decreed*, &c., are used in several hymns in Watts and Rippon, I think improperly, for *purpose* or *predestination*.

The *absolute predestination* – not decreeing – of all things, is what has been advocated in the *Signs*. The reason why some have opposed predestination, I apprehend, is their confounding it with decrees. The ideas conveyed by the two terms, according to their natural import, and as they are used in the Scriptures, are quite different. *Decree* signifies an *edict*, or established ordinance; and to decree is to make known an ordinance by command or proclamation. Of course, when the *decree* refers to intelligent beings, it is what they are required to observe; and when it refers to inanimate things, it points out the order which God has established for them. So it is evidently used in the Scriptures. The term decree is used, denoting an act of God, in reference to the rain, &c. Job 28:26; in reference to the sea, Job 38:8-11; and Prov. 8:29; in relation to the heavens, Psalms 148:6. The term is used to denote that order, &c., which should be established and made known for Zion by her King, "I will declare the decree," Ps.2:7; to inform Nebuchadnezzar that he must submit to the humiliation which God had appointed for him, Dan. 4:17 & 25. So the resolution adopted by the apostles under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, for the rule of the Gentiles (Acts 15:28-29) is called their decrees Acts 16:4. We find the word repeatedly used in the Scriptures, to denote the edicts and commands issued by the kings and rulers of the earth to their subjects. Thus according to the uniform use of the word *decree* in the Scriptures, we may say that God's decree concerning Adam was, that he should not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; that in the day he eat thereof he should surely die. *Predestination*, on the other hand, though given in some of our dictionaries as synonymous with *decree*, from the use of it in scholastic divinity, is a formative from two Latin words, *prae* (before), and *destinatio* (a purpose, destination, determination, &c.), so to predestinate is formed of *prae* and *destino*, of like import. Hence to predestinate is to purpose, to determine beforehand. So the Greek word rendered to *predestinate*, signifies *to define, to bound, to determine, &c., beforehand*. Hence predestination is a counseling, purposing or determining beforehand. And these words, as is well known, relate to the conclusion a person arrives at relative to his own future management, rather than to a rule to be observed by others. Thus men predestinate, not absolutely, at least not with certainty, for

whilst all is certainty with God, *time and chance happeneth to all men*. A man predestinates to build a house; he predestinates the size, the form, the kind of materials, the class of workmen he will employ, &c., and if he knew, as God knows, he would predestinate the exact time and expense it should take; and this predestination is to govern his own arrangements in contracting for, and ordering the building, &c. So God's predestination is that according to which He governs the world; and conducts all things relative to salvation and glory. It extends with the utmost precision to every event that occurs under His dominion, even to the fall of a sparrow, and to the hairs of our head, and to the *small* dust of the balance; for nations are counted as the small dust of the balance by Him; and His infinitude extends as directly to the notice of the one as the other. Mt. 10:29-30; Isa. 40:15. So the term predestination is evidently used in the New Testament; as in Rom.8:29, "He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son." This is not given as a rule to which the elect must conform themselves, but a declaration of what God, by His grace, will do with, and for them. And so in Eph. 1:5.

The old London Baptist Confessions had stated that God "decreed" all things (or "concerning all things") from eternity. Trott objected to this terminology because a decree is generally understood in common usage to be a positive command and a thing that should be done. Trott objected that to say God "decreed" sin would imply that He positively commanded it. It was for this reason that Trott substituted "predestinated" for "decreed," and such reasoning apparently gave root to the expression, "absolute predestination of all things." He justified his use of "predestinated" on the meaning of the Greek term *proorizo* from which "predestinated" was translated in the King James Bible. A problem with his reasoning is that "predestinated" typically conveys a narrower idea in the English language, and in theological tradition, than *proorizo* does in the Greek. As might be expected, his switch in terms did little to improve the problem. Trott would be disappointed to know that his new terminology eventually led to the very conclusions that he was apparently trying to avoid. From all appearance, he was actually seeking to avoid the impression that God is the author and approver of sin. Trott went on to say:

Thus, while God's decree forbade Adam's eating of the tree of knowledge, He predestinated his eating of it; that is, God foreknowing with certainty that Adam, if left to encounter the temptation in his own creaturely weakness, would sin, predestinated so to leave him to meet the temptation, and to permit the temptation to be presented to him. So every sin which God permits to take place in the world, from the greatest to the least, from the crucifying of Christ to the parting of His garments among the soldiers, God predestinated its taking place and its working for the greater good. Acts 2:23; and 4:27 & 28; and Psalm 22:18, compared with Mt. 27:35. This predestination is not a constraining the will of the individuals, but a leaving them to act it out under the attending circumstances. Thus God *works all things after the counsel of His own will* (Eph. 1:11), permitting sin to transpire where He sees it for good, and restraining it in other cases; and constraining by His providence, or grace, to acts of goodness, &c.

As to our saying that the foreknowledge and predestination of God are synonymous, if that is what the Licking brethren mean, we do not say so. We say that from the nature of things, they must go together, and be mutually dependent one on the other. We do not admit that God predestinated any event merely because He foreknew it would take place, but because, from His foreknowledge of all things and circumstances, He in infinite wisdom saw that it would be for the greater good. God cannot foreknow any event unless it is certain, because His foreknowledge is unerring; and it cannot be certain unless He has determined concerning it, and all circumstances leading to it. Thus the prophecies of God, in their accomplishment, are a standing proof of His absolute predestination in all things. – ("An Examination," Signs., vol 14, 1846)

The Licking Circular accused the old Absoluters of making foreknowledge and predestination the same thing, and it had charged that this would make God the author of sin. Trott here denied this, and said these things are “mutually dependent one on the other.” This is a defining statement. It shows Trott did not hold the errant idea that God could surely foreknow an event only if he unconditionally compelled that event to occur. Trott’s earlier description of the sin of Adam is completely consistent with this interpretation of his meaning.

Later in the paragraph, Trott might appear to contradict himself on this point when he says, “God cannot foreknow any event unless ... He has determined concerning it.” However, a contradiction is highly improbable given Trott’s usual precision of thought. He was not denying the ability of God to foresee how events would unfold if left to act of their own accord. Rather, he meant that God could not foresee events if He had any uncertainty in Himself. Stated differently, for any sequence of future events, God could not foresee far down the sequence if He were uncertain as to His own interventions at earlier points. It is in this sense only that foresight is predicated on predetermination. The context indicates this is what Trott meant. This explanation exonerates Trott from teaching a doctrine implying God as the author of sin.

When Trott said, “We do not admit that God predestinated any event merely because He foreknew it would take place,” he was not contradicting his claim that sinful acts were known and permitted by God. His meaning was that, as God is the Creator of all things, and the laws by which they are governed, there is nothing in the creation in which His hand has no part; hence, there was nothing for Him “merely” to foresee. A man might “merely” foresee something when he had no part in it, but this cannot be the case with God. Also, given the pervasive “ripple effects” of divine intervention, it is unreasonable to suppose that any event has been totally uninfluenced by such. So no event is “merely” foreseen. By “ripple effects,” I am referring to the numerous direct and indirect consequences that must flow from every instance of divine intervention. These effects were of course comprehended and fully accounted in the divine mind when His plan was formulated.

When Trott said, “Thus the prophecies of God, in their accomplishment, are a standing proof of His absolute predestination in all things,” this would not be true under a typical definition of “predestination,” but it is true under Trott’s peculiar definition.

It is clear that Beebe held the same views as Trott. I will begin with:

Every intelligent being knows that in committing sin, he acts voluntarily, and follows the impulse of his own depraved nature, and every one who is born of God and taught by his Spirit, knows that sin is the opposite of holiness; that God is holy, and that sin is of the devil, and not of God. Still a consciousness of God’s supreme power and wisdom, to fix its bounds, and say to it as he has said to the waters of the deep, “Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed,” affords a strong consolation to all who look alone to God for succor, protection and support, while destined to remain as strangers and pilgrims on the earth. – (“Absolute Predestination,” Signs., 1858)

Beebe taught consistently that predestination applied to sin, but time and again he explained it exactly as he did here, namely, that if sin had not been predestined, it would have overrun the

earth. Thus his meaning was that God had predetermined which sins and how much sin to permit, and had put bounds against sin so that it would go no further. He clearly felt that “permit” and “allow” were proper terms to describe God’s relationship to sin, as may be seen in:

Balaam was forced to acknowledge that he could not go (though a wicked prophet,) beyond the word (or decree,) of the Lord; and Satan himself, if he could speak truth, would tell us that he could not drown a swine without the permission of God. – (“Absolute Predestination,” Signs., March 19, 1834)

It certainly does not become us to say that either his wisdom, holiness, prescience or power, are at fault, that he has allowed his creatures to rebel against his government, when he had power and wisdom enough to have prevented it, if it had been his pleasure so to have done. – (“Absolute Predestination,” Signs., July 1, 1855)

It is apparent that Beebe was addressing opposition in many of his articles on this subject. Strangely, there are several points where he seemed to perceive his challengers as questioning even the right of God to permit sin when it could have been prevented. These challenges were possibly coming from the New School Baptists (i.e. Fullerite or Arminian Baptists), which leads to another important fact, namely, the motivation for the word “absolute,” which is explained in the same article:

As this word is nowhere used in the Scriptures to qualify the word Predestination, we will not contend for it, especially as the word predestination when rightly understood needs no such qualification, as it cannot be otherwise than absolute. We merely use the word absolute to distinguish our views of predestination from those who, while they admit that the term is frequently used in the Scriptures, deny its plain and obvious meaning, as though it were only vaguely used by the inspired writers, without any positive or unequivocal meaning.

Of course, the Arminians are prone to say that God predestined salvation only after he foresaw some obedience in those He predestined. This makes the word “predestined” of no significance whatsoever, and it had just as well been blotted from the Bible. It was likely to such nonsense that Beebe here refers. But the problem with Beebe’s explanation is that his own definition of predestination was not absolute enough to counter his Arminian adversaries on this point. A predestination to permit sin could carry over to the idea of a predestination to permit salvation. This explains why the Fulton brethren wanted different terms to describe God’s relationships to sin and salvation, though it does not appear that the old Absoluters truly differed from the Fulton brethren in meaning.

Beebe frequently asserted that God’s foresight was based upon predestination, but closer inspection reveals that his meaning was the same as Trott’s. He did not mean that God must compel events to happen, as would a man, in order to foresee them. He meant that God could not foresee events if He were undecided concerning His own interventions at points prior to the event. This can be seen in the same article:

We cannot believe that our God would declare a thing beforehand that he was undecided upon, and which might be quite different from what he had declared; and if he has only declared what he had determined on, that is the most absolute predestination that we have any knowledge of.

This predetermination of events extends throughout all the intervening space, from the beginning to the end, and consequently embraces all things.

I will now return to the writings of Trott to consider the issue of supralapsarianism. Some might speculate that the old Absoluters all accepted this doctrine. Such speculations would be wrong. This can be seen in an article in which Trott addressed a variation of the two-seed heresy being advocated in those days. The variation being considered claimed that God had placed two human genetic seed lines in the world, one for the purpose of salvation and the other for the purpose of damnation. This bizarre theory claimed that the good seed line had been placed in Adam, but that the other had been placed directly in Eve, by which she conceived Cain, from whom the cursed strain came. I mention these details so that sense can be made of what follows. This theory has a similarity with supralapsarianism in that it has God creating some people from an intent to damn them. Trott found this particular aspect of the theory to be very odious, as may be seen in his reply to the man who proposed it:

You, I presume, will admit that faith in receiving and resting upon the teachings of God leads the mind to the knowledge of truth. If so, I will ask you, my brother, to point to a single instance of one who gives evidence of being a subject of grace, ascribing his salvation to his possessing any better or distinct nature from his neighbor who is without faith; that is, that he was originally created in Adam, and pronounced good, and therefore, is a subject of grace, whilst his neighbor was the production of God's curse? On the contrary, does not each subject of grace believe and feel that his nature is as vile, as depraved and as justly under the curse of God's law, as that of any around him, and that it is nothing but God's sovereign and distinguishing grace that has made him to differ from others in having hope of salvation? And that this grace reigned not through Adam, but through Christ? That it is because God will have mercy on whom He will have mercy independent of all distinctions in nature that he has hope. If then God's teaching does not lead our faith into error, our experience establishes the fact that we are not saved because we are any better in nature than others, or of a different production from them, and that all boasting in the creature is excluded. The above could not be the experience of God's teachings, if we are made to differ from others in being subjects of mercy because we were created in Adam and they were not.

Hence, Trott appealed to the spiritual conscience, claiming that we are convicted by it to look upon condemned people with a sense of commonalty, knowing that only divine mercy distinguishes us from them. But under the heresy being proposed, there was in fact no such commonalty, because they differed with us from the very beginning of divine purpose, and were intended for damnation, whereas we were intended for salvation. Trott found this unconscionable, yet the same principle is taught by supralapsarianism. Trott went on to say:

God, according to this idea, instead of choosing some of Adam's posterity or seed and leaving the rest, appointed the whole of His creation in Adam to salvation, and the rest of mankind are an after production for the display of God's wrath. This certainly does not correspond with the scriptural idea of election. There is no choice in it. Christ said to His disciples: "I have chosen you out of the world" John 15:19. Again, it is said: "Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred and tongue, and people, and nation" Rev.5:9...

God, therefore, according to this system, must have determined to produce this class from the woman expressly for the devil, or for making them the subjects of His curse. But certainly this idea cannot agree with that revelation which God has made of Himself as a God of justice and of

love, and is one which I cannot receive without direct proof from the Scriptures. I think I am willing to go as far as others in acknowledging the absolute sovereignty of God as consisting with His holy, self-existing and independent Being; but when this sovereignty is extended to God's denying Himself or any of His holy attributes, which would be the case by making Him the author of sin or the direct cause of any of His creatures being accursed, I cannot admit of its correctness. God's predestinating sin to come into the world, or the human family being made sinners by Adam's voluntary transgression, and His predestinating to leave part of Adam's posterity to go on in sin, and thereby entail upon themselves the curse of the law, whilst He predestinated others to salvation by Christ Jesus, are very different from the idea that sin directly emanated from God, that pure fountain of love, or that He produced a class of beings for the express purpose of showing upon them the power of His wrath.

Then Trott commented on the lump of clay from which vessels of both wrath and mercy were formed:

I now come to that portion of Romans, chapter 9th, to which you more particularly refer, namely: verse 21-24. Paul asks, in reply to those who would cavil at the sovereignty of God in election as he had set it forth, "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump, to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?" No doubt some have inferred, because man was originally made of the dust of the earth, that Paul meant by this figure to convey the idea that God created some part of the human family for happiness, and some for misery. But the apostle is not treating in the connection of the original creation of man; this figure, therefore, which he uses in defending his position, was not designed to apply to creation. Paul was treating of God's dealings with men as they exist, in having mercy on whom He would, and whom He would He hardened. To this the figure applies. The potter does not make the clay, he finds it ready made, and after softening and preparing it for his use, puts it on his wheel and shapes it into whatever vessel he chooses. Open to the view of God from the beginning were all His works, and all events on to the end. He saw man as the production of His hands, and saw him fallen by transgression; and thus fallen, *dead in trespasses and sins*, He saw him as fit material from which to form a vessel of mercy or a vessel of wrath. As vessels of wrath, God need but to leave, as far as He sees fit, men to act out their depravity, and to choose their own course of open sin, or of depending on their own works and ways for acceptance with God, and they are fitted for destruction. This you know by experience, if you are what I hope you are, a subject of grace. Men, also, by transgression, became fit material for vessels of mercy or of honor. For, without being sinners, men would not be objects of mercy; and without being just such ruined, helpless sinners, as they are in themselves, fitted to destruction, they would not be objects on which God could display the *riches of His grace and mercy*...

In the vessels of wrath is evidently meant those left out of the election of grace, and therefore left to meet the demands of the law in their own persons. If the question is still farther asked, how are these vessels fitted to destruction? In addition to what I have said already on this subject, I will refer to the testimony of Scripture on the point. We are told, in Rom. 5:19, that "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners;" and in verse 18, that, "By the offence of one, judgment came upon all men unto condemnation." In Eccl. 7:29, we read, "That God hath made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions." In Rom. 1:28-32, it is written, "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind," &c. In Rom. 2:5, Paul speaks of man thus: "But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." Now from these testimonies we learn that *God made man upright*; man universally, of course;

and that by one man's disobedience many were made sinners. – ("Views on Elder Parker's Two-Seed System," Signs., vol 25, 1857)

I will quote Trott once more to show his soundness on the matter of free will, which he discussed while commenting on the hardening of Pharaoh's heart:

...Pharaoh, in refusing to let Israel go, acts with that self-determination which fully proved it to have been his own voluntary act; that he acted as a free agent, according to the sense in which some use the term, and which the term properly imports, that is one who acts voluntarily or from choice. An independent agent or doer cannot exist short of the independent God. Thus all rational creatures, whilst they act completely under the government and control of God, being made to accomplish His purpose even in their wicked opposition to Him, act voluntarily, consulting and acting out the inclination of their own hearts. Neither is it necessary that God should infuse, in any way, any hardness or rebellion of heart to His government, into men in order to induce them to act wickedly or contrary to the demands of His law; this hardness already exists there as the consequence of man's original apostasy. Hence I do not understand that in hardening Pharaoh's heart God added anything to the native enmity or wickedness of his heart, but only that, in that (to us) incomprehensible way already spoken of, He so directed and brought into action this native enmity, as thereby to accomplish His own sovereign purpose, whilst in all this opposition to letting Israel go, Pharaoh was completely acting out himself. Most probably God exerted this control over Pharaoh to bring out his wickedness, in a providential way, that is, by placing him in his exalted position, or in Scripture language, raising him up and surrounding him with his magicians, and other circumstances, such as leading him to engage in his ambitious projects for which he was employing Israel in his brick yards, &c., being led thus resolutely to resist the release of God's people. Thus it would appear that in some instances the magicians imitating the miracles of Moses was the occasion of Pharaoh's heart being hardened. See Exod.7:12, 13-22. And God undoubtedly knew that the magicians would imitate those miracles before He directed Moses to perform them. – ("Views on Exodus 10:1," Signs., vol 9, 1841)

As for whatever controversy existed on the subject of absolute predestination in the early 19th century, Sylvester Hassell quoted J.R. Respass as saying, "...we believe it to be a difference more about words than in spirit," (p 653). This is evidently so in the case of Beebe and Trott, who popularized the expression "absolute predestination of all things." Trott had relevant concerns with the terminology of the London Confession statement that God had "decreed all things." This is apparently what led the old Absoluters to substitute "predestinated" for "decreed." But history has shown their terminology to be even more confusing.

The quotes of this section should be sufficient to show that Beebe and Trott, men of great intellect and erudition, would not endorse Absolutism as it has been understood and advocated by some since their times. I will conclude this section by finishing the earlier quote from Sylvester Hassell on this subject.

In Vol. 2, No. 3 pages 33-35, Elder Samuel Trott (the most scholarly and able of all the early contributors to the *Signs*) says what I have often stated, with both my tongue and pen, that the literal meaning of the Greek word, *pro-orizo*, which is translated *predestinate* in the King James version, is to *fore-bound*, *fore-limit*; and, in accordance with this true meaning of the word, he gives the most able, correct, and unobjectionable statement of the doctrine of the "Absolute Predestination of All Things" that I have ever seen. He says: – "God exercises universal dominion over His creatures, – exercises control over wicked actions and thoughts to limit their

extent, to over-rule their results in accordance with His purposes. The predestination of God determines the results, fixes the limits, and so controls the actions and devices of wicked men and devils as to cause them to terminate in the furtherance of His own glorious purposes.” Thus, according to the plainest teachings of the Scriptures and of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, the origin of and instigation to sin are not at all to be ascribed to a Most Holy God, (which would be the most horrible blasphemy,) but to his rebellious creatures; while the limitation and over-ruling of sin for the furtherance of his glorious purposes are truthfully to be ascribed to God. This great and momentous truth, every Primitive Baptist and every Christian joyfully believes. If those who maintain the doctrine of the “Absolute Predestination of All Things” had always confined themselves to these original scriptural statements of the original advocates of that doctrine, there never would have been the confusion and division that have arisen among Primitive Baptists on this subject. Only by a return to the original scriptural ground can there be a return to gospel fellowship and union. – (“My Six Weeks Tour to the Northeast,” Zions Advocate, Feb 1895)

When this quote is carefully considered, Hassell was making the same distinction as Oliphant at the beginning of this chapter. Oliphant defined “predestined” by saying everything God does is predestined. Hassell allowed that God had “predestined” sin in the sense of setting boundaries against it. Obviously, a distinction must be made between the boundary and the sin itself. Under Oliphant’s definition, and under the meaning of “predestined” in theological tradition, it would be more proper to say the boundary was “predestined,” and by it the sin was regulated and overruled in such a manner as to achieve the objectives of God.

Comments on Romans 8:28-30

An important text on the periphery of the subject of decrees has been:

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. – Rom 8:28-30

The point at issue is the meaning of “*all things*” where it is asserted that all things work together for good. Some have said it means absolutely all things, including even our own sins. Others have contended it means only those things mentioned in the remainder of the quote. Disputes between advocates of these two views have been numerous and without much resolution. The likely reason for this endless wrangle is that neither interpretation is exactly correct, nor does it appear that either interpretation was widely accepted by Primitive Baptists of the past.

Nothing could be more out of character with the Bible than a claim that personal sins work together for our own good. If this is indeed what the above text means, it is without precedent in the scriptures. We would never expect the Bible to say that acts of adultery, murder, drunkenness, etc. will work to the good of those who perpetrate them. Indeed, the Bible plainly teaches exactly the opposite. Nothing could be plainer than:

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. – Gal 6:7-8

This text assures us that our sins do not work together for our good, and claims a mockery would be made of God were it otherwise. As surely as God has designed wheat to bring forth wheat and apples to bring forth apples, so will sin bring forth corruption. Conscience and personal experience teach us the same. When we look back upon past sins, we are either ashamed of them, or know that we should be such, and know that whatever good may have resulted from our actions should have been obtained in a better way. So we never attribute any such good to the sin itself, and therefore the sin itself cannot be contemplated in the “*all things*” of Rom 8:28.

Some have insisted that good will come of sin when God chastens the sinner and leads him to repentance. This is a dubious explanation of the text, because it essentially says that the good working together from sin is that the sinner learns his sin does not work together for good! Since it is a self-defeating explanation, it cannot convey what the Apostle intended. Earlier in the same book (Rom 3:8), Paul denounced those who say, “*Let us do evil that good may come,*” and he said their “*damnation is just.*” It hardly seems likely that he would say here that any good comes to us from our own wicked actions.

However, the opposing interpretation is also deficient, because it is a dubious rule of interpretation that says context is limited only to a subsequent verse. The things named in verse 29 are surely things that work together for our good, but Paul says shortly thereafter that we are more than conquerors in tribulation, distress, persecution, etc. through Him that loved us. These things are therefore agreeable with his statement concerning “*all things.*” With respect to our own actions, the text seems to say nothing more nor less than what is promised in 1Cor 15:58 – “*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*” All that we do in love for God will work together for our good. A man may be as David and commit adultery even though he loves God, yet he does not love God *in* committing adultery. This will not work together for his good. It is positively forbidden.

One explanation of the text that surely conveys a truth is that all things *purposed and done by God* work together for our good. Every Divine purpose and act will benefit His children, and His children will experience no good apart from this. Even our works done in love to Him have their ultimate source in what He has done for us. As for sin, whether ours or others’, God’s purpose in allowing it is calculated to work together for our good, but the sin itself does not work together for such. So God’s part in the matter is good, and purposed for our good, but our role in the matter is neither good nor conducive thereto. This explanation likely conveys the general principle intended by the Apostle. This may be seen by reading through the 32nd verse:

What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? – Rom 8:31-32

Observe how the expression “*all things*” again occurs in the 32nd verse, and very likely has exactly the same meaning as in verse 28, though here the intended meaning is transparent. It refers to all things freely given us by God as a consequence of the five things named in verse 29 (i.e. foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification and glorification). Hence, the 28th verse is truly a classic case of where confusion can be resolved simply by considering context. Further

observe that the expression “*these things*” in verse 31 clearly intends the five things named in verse 29, yet the Apostle reasons that if these five things be so, then we are compelled to conclude that God will “also” freely give us “*all things*.” Hence, “*all things*” must include something more than the five things; otherwise, the word “also” would be meaningless. The errant claim that “*all things*” refers only to the five things actually fails to properly appreciate those things, because the Apostle here reasons that these five things are so momentous in their implications that the good of them cannot be self-contained.

What then does the text say of the tragedies that oftentimes victimize God’s children? Such things are almost surely considered by the text given what is later said about tribulation, persecution, distress, etc. Of course these things are all the consequences of sin, sometimes being the result of particular sins, and at other times resulting from the general curse of sin, so it is only in some qualified sense that they work together for our good. We can say of these what we say of all else, namely, that the role of sin in these things is not good, and does not work together for our good, but that the role of God surely does. All things *purposed and done by God* are good and work together for our good. The tragedies that befall us, while not always being caused by God, are at least allowed by Him, and His decision to allow them surely had some purpose in view. That purpose can only be good, and can only be in the interest of His blood-bought children. If He spared not His own Son for them, then no other conclusion is admissible.

To summarize these remarks: The expression “*all things*” therefore refers to all things freely given us of God, whether in time or eternity, as a consequence of the five things named in verse 29. This interpretation accords both with context and reason, and I think it is in essentially agreement with the views generally held by Primitive Baptists of the past. The following is an article written by Sylvester Hassell in “The Gospel Messenger,” April 1900. I think he properly interpreted the text:

All Things Work Together for Good To Them That Love God

From the language of the Apostle Paul before and after this verse (in verses 16 to 27, and 29 to 39), it is evident that by “all things” in the 28th verse he means all the sufferings, trials, tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, peril, or death which the child of God endures here on earth, that is, all the afflictive providences of God which seem to be for his injury, but which conform him by Divine grace to the humble and watchful and prayerful and patient and heavenly and holy image of Christ, and thus really work together for his spiritual and eternal good, according to God’s purposes of infinite love towards him from eternity, so that, instead of desponding and murmuring under earthly trials, he ought rather to resignedly and even thankfully receive them as sure evidences of his Heavenly Father’s love. The inspired Apostle says that “we know” this truth; he knew it from his own many and severe afflictions, imprisonment, scourging, stoning, hunger, thirst, cold, and even the opposition, slander, and reproaches of false brethren; and all the children of God know it, not only from His Word and His infinite love for them in giving them His Son and Spirit, but also from their own spiritual experience, and from that of their brethren and sisters. Paul expresses the same precious truth in Rom. v. 1-5, and in 2 Cor. iv. 15-18, and in Heb. xii; and so does James in his Epistle, i. 2-4; and Peter in his 1st Epistle, iv. 12-16. It is certain that by the expression “all things,” which Paul uses many times, he seldom, if ever, means all things universally or unlimitedly, but “all things” in a special or limited sense, as explained by the context, his preceding and following words (see especially Rom. xiv. 20; 1 Cor. ix. 22; x. 23,33; xiii. 7; Eph. i. 10; Philip. iv. 13; Col. iii. 22; and 1 Tim. vi. 17). The idea that he

included a believer's own sins in the "all things" is not only foreign to the connection in which this passage occurs, but it seems utterly forbidden by his language in Rom. ii. 1-16; iii. 8; vi., and by all the remainder of the word of God which proclaims His infinite holiness and infinite hatred and punishment of sin. To be sure – God can and does bring life out of death, light out of darkness, order out of confusion, and salvation out of ruin, but God alone does it, and sin is not to be praised, nor is the sinner to be thanked for it at all; and there is not one letter in the Holy Scriptures to encourage any creature in sin, which is rebellion against God, who is, to sin in every form and in every being, a consuming fire (Deut. iv. 24; Heb. xii. 29).

TIME SALVATION

The Proper Meaning of “Time Salvation”

The necessary conditions for salvation to heaven are absolute, definitive and common to all elect. There are no degrees in being justified or in being spiritually born. A man is either righteous before God or he is not, and he is either spiritually dead or spiritually alive. These things are also done altogether by God of His own sovereign will and are therefore independent of the will of man. Nearly all Christians agree that these measures are not only necessary conditions for salvation but are also sufficient. That is, all who have them will surely be saved to heaven in the end. For this reason, Primitive Baptists have commonly grouped these things under the label “eternal salvation.” This term could also embrace the ideas of resurrection and glorification.

However, the temporal fruits and effects of such salvation clearly are not equal in all elect and are not independent of their wills. Such things can differ from one saved person to another. Children of God can have varying degrees of knowledge, implying varying degrees of conversion to the truth. They can have varying degrees of obedience. These together imply varying degrees of what is commonly called “practical sanctification.” Finally, they can have varying degrees of assurance and joy. While divine sovereignty oftentimes causes such differences, they can also be owing to the choices that a person makes. For example, the assurance and joy of one Christian can be greater than that of another because he has been more obedient to the word of God. For purposes of proper distinction, Primitive Baptists have commonly grouped this second set of things under the label “time salvation.”

The reason for the adjective “time” is because it concerns matters that are relevant only in the temporal experience of the child of God. Things classified under “eternal salvation” can also occur in time (e.g. regeneration), but are classified differently because they are the necessary and sufficient conditions for a blissful eternity.

The primary motivation for the distinction between eternal and time salvation is to accommodate the fact that the terms “save” and its derivatives are used in various ways in scripture. They can refer to glorification or resurrection or regeneration or justification, or to assurance and other temporal blessings, or can refer to these things in various combinations. Context must be consulted to know the exact meaning. If this is not done, the Bible will become a very confusing book, primarily because it will have “salvation” being dependent on the will of man in some places but independent of it in others. The Bible becomes coherent when these texts are properly classified under the various meanings of “save,” “salvation”, etc. The labels “eternal salvation” and “time salvation” are intended to serve to such effect.

I should mention that “time salvation” can sometimes be used with reference to blessings that both natural and spiritual men might receive. For example, Noah built the ark to the “saving” of his house (Heb 11:7). God has also saved non-elect in the sense here intended. Also consider, *“For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe,”* (1Tim 4:10). The clear meaning here is that God is the savior of all men in a *temporal* sense, but of believers in an *eternal* sense. For sake of clarity, this type of “time salvation” should be distinguished from those blessings that

only regenerate men can receive. We might call one a “natural time salvation” and the other a “spiritual time salvation,” but I simply use “time salvation” in this chapter to refer to the latter only, i.e. to blessings that only children of God experience.

In numerous of the ancient English Baptist quotes presented in prior chapters, distinctions to the same effect were made but sometimes with a different approach. The English Baptists were more apt to make a distinction between the *reality* of salvation and its temporal *realization*. For example, on the subject of justification, many of them essentially said that, in reality, our sins were put away by the death of Christ, but our realization or perception of this occurs when we are brought to faith. Now this perception that occurs in faith is what some would call “time salvation.” Either approach intends valid and necessary ideas, though one approach may be clearer for some purposes than the other.

As sensible as these concepts should be to sensible minds, the term “time salvation” has provoked controversy for as long as it has existed. Objections can be classified three ways, two of which are motivated by heretical notions and one which is potentially valid.

The first class of objectors considers things classified under “time salvation” to be causes or means of things classified under “eternal salvation.” Consequently, they do not like where lines are drawn in this classification system. They consider gospel conversion to be a cause or means of justification and/or regeneration. The same might be thought of practical sanctification. These objectors are standing guard over doctrinal delusions that are opposed by the reasoning that underlies time salvation.

The second class of objectors are extreme proponents of passive obedience. These think the human will has no more to do with conversion, assurance, etc. than it does with regeneration. They say that in all these respects men only act out what God moves them to do under His comprehensive plan for their lives. This objection derives from misunderstanding of God’s decrees. That God has a complete, predetermined plan for all His children is undeniable, but the claim that His plan was drawn in complete disregard to their decisions is false. God has not decided all things in their experience; rather, He has decided *concerning* all things in their experience. Where God gives ability He also gives responsibility. The elect are passive in eternal salvation, being moved from death to life, but they are partially active in the things classified as “time salvation.” Indeed, it would be disingenuous to call them “alive” if this were not true. More will be said of this later.

The third class of objectors oftentimes have a valid complaint. All things classified under time salvation are subject to *degree*, which then leads to questions as to *what* degree, i.e. to what degree will regenerates be converted to truth, walk in obedience, etc. On matters of degree, it is easier to know what is wrong than to know what is exactly right. For example, a man seated on his porch may not know the exact temperature, but he knows it isn’t boiling and it isn’t freezing. Now some imagine regenerates as having so little of the things classified under “time salvation” as to make them indistinguishable from unregenerates. Hence, the question of degree is carried to an extreme where error is palpable. The threshold between what is reasonable and what is unreasonable is generally not difficult to define: Time salvation becomes a perverted concept

when it entails a denial of the clear, repeated, and unequivocal scriptural declarations that Christ rejecters are carnal, unregenerate men on a path leading to eternal damnation.

In the most extreme cases, time salvation is used as leverage to advance Universalism. Here it will be claimed that all scriptural distinctions between saved and unsaved refer *only* to time, and have no relevance to eternity because there, they say, all will be saved. According to this absurd theory, men are elected and predestined only to see the truth *in time*, though all men, they say, will acknowledge it hereafter. This discovery of truth in time is what they typically consider to be the new birth. Time salvation is not only perverted to justify such conclusions but is oftentimes used as a facade to conceal the fact that Universalism is the ultimate intent of the reasoning. Sylvester Hassell aptly said of this doctrine:

The present writer has read, with deep attention, the most recent and elaborate arguments advanced against the Bible doctrine of the everlasting duration of future punishment; he has compared these reasonings with themselves, with the original Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, and with the latest and most authoritative lexicons, and he is constrained to declare his belief that, for the very *perfection of sophistry*, these infidel treatises have no equal in the entire range of human literature. *The same methods of explanation would make anything mean nothing.* – Church History, ch viii

Such abuses have soured the taste of many for the “time salvation / eternal salvation” paradigm. Notwithstanding, abuses of similar degree have been made of predestination, baptism and other concepts whose relevance cannot be questioned.

When properly viewed, time salvation is not truly a doctrine. It makes no doctrinal assertions that would not have been made in its absence. It is simply an expression that groups several familiar and accepted doctrinal concepts under one label. It embraces the idea of conversion to the truth, the temporal blessings that come from knowing the truth, and the deliverance from lies and their temporal consequences. It also embraces the idea of sanctification in righteousness, the temporal blessings that come from such, and the deliverance from unrighteousness and its temporal consequences. But the most important ideas embraced by the term are the personal discovery of eternal salvation, the personal reassurance of it, and the peace and joy that derive from being eternally saved. Because of the latter, time salvation is closely connected to the idea of eternal salvation. They are distinct concepts but are not separate.

An important observation on the New Testament is that in its 172 usages of “save” and its derivatives, only once were they applied to an Old Testament saint. There it referred to the “saving” of Noah and his house by the ark, which is clearly only a natural form of deliverance. There are also numerous suggestions that Old Testament saints were not “saved” in the sense in which the word is often intended in the New Testament (e.g. 1Pet 1:9-12, Heb 11:13 & 11:39-40, Rom 16:25-27). So the common street-definitions of “heaven bound” or “born again” are not exact fits on many instances of the word “saved” in the Bible. It there includes not only these ideas but also the personal realization of them. This means that the old English Baptist paradigm of reality versus realization may be a clearer way of explanation than of eternity versus time.

To make further sense of this, consider that the word “saved” presupposes a former state of trouble. In the case being considered, it is the worst conceivable form of trouble – alienation

from God on account of sin and fear of the consequences that befall such. One point upon which all sensible Christians agree is that no competent man can be saved in Jesus Christ except one who has contrition over past and present sin. Arminians, Calvinists and all strains of each agree that a self-righteous man is the furthest thing from a saved man. Hence, the personal experience of salvation in Christ must always commence from a troubled mind, and cannot be considered complete until that mind is set at peace. This explains why “saved” commonly refers not only to a reality but also to its realization. It also explains why the term “saved” is not applied to Old Testament saints. Paul gave insight to their psychology when describing their religious service, *“Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience,”* (Heb 9:9). And then he said of their perpetual sacrifices: *“For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins,”* (Heb 10:2). These texts assert that the consciences of Old Testament saints were still under the burden of sin, but Paul said of New Testament saints:

For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. – Heb 9:13-15

The clear meaning here is that the difference between Old Testament and New Testament saints is not in their *reality*, because all of them were saved to heaven, but it was in their *realization*. The Old Testament saint had the eternal inheritance, but the New Testament saint has not only this but also *“the promise of the eternal inheritance.”* Obviously, a primary purpose of the book of Hebrews was to explain to the Jewish people the harmony between law and gospel, and how the gospel distinguished their case from that of their forefathers.

I will finish this section by citing a sample of scriptures that are generally agreed to speak of “time salvation” as defined in this section. The list is not complete, but contains the most obvious occurrences:

And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. – Acts 2:40

For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? – Rom 8:24

If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. – 1Cor 3:15-16

By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. – 1Cor 15:2

Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost. – 1Thes 2:16

Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee. – 1Tim 4:16

And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. – Js 5:15

The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. – 1Pet 3:21

And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? – 1Pet 4:18

Conditionality in Time Salvation

Oftentimes the expression “time salvation” has been preceded by the word “conditional.” This word is usually annoying to believers in the doctrines of grace because of how Arminians abuse it, so the expression “conditional time salvation” has been a real point of controversy with some. My intent is to address this controversy here, but will warn that debates on this subject have been about as confused and confusing as any religious discussions I have ever heard. So my characterizations of the dissenters may or may not be fair representations of them all. Also, it is not my intent to defend the idea that *all* time salvation is conditional, or the idea that any form of time salvation is *altogether* conditional. The question is whether *any* of it is.

I will define the word “conditional” to mean “having dependency on the will.” Of course it is understood that in any event where a man might exercise a choice, it was the sovereign decision of God that gave the man his existence, and that God did it knowing what the man would do if left to act freely, and that it was God who decided whether to prevent the man, influence the man or leave him to his choice, and upon this divine decision, the man’s choice was moved from the realm of mere possibility into the realm of pending reality, and was in this sense predetermined. But the final outcome in this case might very well reflect the choice of the man, meaning that the event was “conditional” in the sense in which I have defined the word.

To further illustrate, consider that the scriptures teach that God has predetermined our time to die. Before any man concludes from this that he is liberated to drink a quart of whisky per day, he should consider that God might have taken his behavior into account when determining his time to die. When God decided whether to deliver such a man from the consequences of his foolish decision or to leave him to these consequences, then the man’s time was predetermined, but obviously not *unconditionally*. Scriptures teach that our predestination to eternal life was unconditional, but this does not imply that all aspects of our temporal experience are such.

God did from eternity “*weigh the path of the just*” (Isa 26:7) in the sense that He formulated a complete plan for each of His children and what His intervention would be throughout their lives. All these things have already been discussed in the chapter on decrees. But the unconditional system seems to deny *any* true dependency of any event on the choice of the man, or at least in the case of regenerate men in their good and spiritual actions. The position seems to claim that such men are as irresistibly moved in these as in regeneration itself. It is difficult to

know what else could be meant when *all* conditionality is denied in time salvation. It is of course true that even regenerate men are in need of the strength and guidance of the Holy Spirit, but the unconditional position denies, or so it seems, that the will of the regenerate man contributes in *any* degree to any good thing he does.

In opposition to this, when a regenerate person is presented with a biblical commandment to obey, all of conscience, reason, experience and scriptures testify to the fact that a conditional circumstance is created in which the outcome will depend in some degree upon a genuine decision by the individual. Children of God are not puppets. This can be seen in the fact that many saints have prayed that God would take control of their lives and direct every thought and step of their future. These prayers are heard to some degree; however, at any point in their future, these saints can look back over that period for which they had prayed and find sins and failures for which they were surely to blame. It is therefore an understatement to say God does not make men puppets. The facts of experience show that God *refuses* to make them such.

To better analyze this issue, consider the following three questions:

- 1) Does the irresistible work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration render a man sufficient for all obedience without further aid from God?
- 2) Are all subsequent operations of the Holy Spirit irresistibly imposed?
- 3) Does the use of potentially resistible operations on regenerates imply a total failure in the intended obedience?

All of these questions must be answered negatively. This is obvious for the first question. As to the second question, one can be sure that the inspiration of the Bible is an operation of the Holy Spirit intended to produce obedience. The degree of obedience commanded by the Bible is defined by the perfect example of Christ. It is utterly dubious to suppose that the indwelling Holy Spirit discards this standard by influencing only toward something less. Yet it is most evident that men do not attain this mark; hence, not all operations of the Holy Spirit are irresistibly imposed. As for the third question, to say that all potentially resistible operations result in total failure would place the Holy Spirit in an exercise of futility in all such operations.

When the Bible states, "*For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure*" (Phil 2:13), this does not imply that all such workings are done irresistibly, nor does it imply that use of resistible work renders the outcome an inevitable failure. Hence, the prior verse stated, "*Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*" This is clearly an exhortation to elicit an active obedience enabled by a state of salvation. But the fact of being saved does not render all such obedience inevitable, nor does use of resistible influences on a saved individual imply that all such influences will in fact be resisted. If being saved rendered the obedience inevitable, or if the Holy Spirit always worked in an irresistible way in the production of obedience, then there would be no occasion to fear and tremble. In that case, we could rest assured that all our works would be found satisfactory with God. On the other hand, if failures in obedience were rendered inevitable by anything less than an irresistible motion of the Spirit, then our fear and trembling would be nothing more than useless anxiety over matters beyond our control.

Another scripture commonly abused on the subject is: “*LORD, thou wilt ordain peace for us: for thou also hast wrought all our works in us,*” (Is 26:12). The text will be explained as meaning that all our acceptable works are irresistibly produced in the same sense in which a puppet is set in motion. But the phrase “*in us*” was translated from the same Hebrew as the prior phrase “*for us,*” and the likely reference is to the imputed righteousness of Christ. This imputed righteousness is of course evidenced by imitated righteousness, but the two must not be confused. The “*ordained peace*” under consideration is shown by context to refer to our experience in the “*land of uprightness*” or heaven (vs 10), and it occurs when “*the fire of thine enemies shall devour*” the wicked (vs 11). Such peace does not derive in the least from our own works, whether they be passive or active.

Though John Calvin understood “works” in this text to mean God’s works in general, even he objected to the interpretation which eradicated freedom of will. Concerning this he said in his commentary:

By *works* he means all the blessings which the Lord bestows on those who believe in him; as if he had said, “Transactions, business, actions,” and everything included in the French phrase *nos affaires*, or in the corresponding English phrase *our affairs*. Accordingly, those who have quoted this passage for the purpose of overturning free-will have not understood the Prophet’s meaning. It is undoubtedly true that God alone does what is good in us, and that all the good actions which men perform are from his Spirit. But here the Prophet merely shews that we have obtained from the hand of God all the good things which we enjoy; and hence he infers that his kindness will not cease till we shall have obtained perfect happiness.

It is certainly the case that the Holy Spirit is pervasive in His management of the regenerate child of God, but not irresistibly so in every aspect of it. This can be seen in:

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry. –
1Cor 10:13-14

With every temptation confronting the child of God, the Spirit will enable a way of escape; therefore, we are not to believe in a “spiritual Deism” wherein the elect are given spiritual life and then abandoned. But the unfailing provision for an ability to escape does not imply they will escape in all cases; therefore, they are commanded to “flee.” They are to view the way of escape with “*fear and trembling*” because it is not before them by chance, but by provision of the Holy Spirit, and this provision only increases their culpability. They are elsewhere commanded not to quench the Spirit (1Thes 5:19), from which it follows they are not to view themselves as passive in the hands of the Spirit when tempted, but as being responsible in a contingency having potentially fearful consequences. Now if this is the way in which they are commanded to contemplate the matter, then it is highly implausible that God would have them view reality in an unrealistic way. It is the unregenerate man who does this. One purpose of time salvation is to deliver a man from such illusions.

Some will argue that while God has commanded in His revealed will to flee from every temptation, yet in His secret will He has predetermined the outcome of every such event. This argument against conditionality is an abuse of: “*The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law,*” (Deut 29:29). This statement was made in the midst of the earliest prophecies about God’s future dealings with the Jewish people. Their experience would prove very complex, being favored by God at times, but severely punished at others; enlightened at times, but blinded at others; left to themselves at times, but at others receiving such mercy that God would even circumcise their hearts in the covenant of grace. God’s dealings with the Jews would become some of the high mysteries of the Bible, and they continue to intrigue Christians today. The intent of the commandment was to say that inability to understand and reconcile these mysteries should not be used to dismiss the importance of obedience or the rewards that would surely derive from it. Now these facts do absolutely nothing to contradict the concept of conditionality. The fact that God has secretly predetermined what to permit, what to cause, what to resistibly influence and what to irresistibly force, and the fact that these decisions would be determinative with respect to Jewish history, do not in the least contradict the claim that a temptation and its accompanying way of escape produce a conditional circumstance for the child of God. The text is actually misused to teach exactly the opposite of what it was intended to say.

Others have charged that conditionality in conversion, sanctification and assurance – the primary components of time salvation – is contradictory to the claim that salvation is by grace. But this objection assigns a strange definition to “grace” suiting the purposes of the objector. It is a definition that fails to distinguish between grace to the dead and grace to the living, between grace to the lame and grace to those who have been enabled to walk, and between grace to the blind and grace to those who have been enabled to see. The lame man healed at the pool of Bethesda (Jn 5:1-15) never took a single step apart from the grace that had enabled him, but this distorted definition of grace insists that the man, notwithstanding his enabled legs, must continue to be carried on his bed if his mobility is truly owing to grace. Accordingly, this definition of grace says that the blind man of John 9, though enabled to see, must not look with his eyes lest grace be compromised by the exercise of his ability. Under this definition, grace may only use its object; it cannot be used by its object. This is not a scriptural definition of “grace.” Paul told Timothy, “*Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus*” (2Tim 2:1), by which he meant to put this grace to use. He told the Corinthians, “*We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain*” (2Cor 6:1), by which he warned against negligence in their use of grace.

The Bible repeatedly commands children of God to obey, but they are never commanded to regenerate themselves. They are completely passive in regeneration, but they are partly active in obedience. This implies a degree of conditionality in their obedience. Some arguing to the contrary have said the difference between regeneration and obedience is not in *conditionality* but only in *instrumentality*. Their claim is that the biblical commandments to obey are divine instruments to the unconditional production of obedience, and that regeneration differs only in that it is produced without any such instrumentality.

This convoluted reasoning confuses ends and means. It supposes that the end is first fixed, namely the desired level of obedience, and then the means, or the commandments, are

implemented to achieve the end. This is surely backwards. Divine law is fixed without any respect to the outcome it will produce. It is defined by the perfect standards of divine justice. This can be seen in the fact that God has given commandments to all men, even though unregenerate men are unable to perform them in a divinely pleasing way. The Lord cannot compromise His perfect standards merely to accommodate their wickedness, and He is under no obligation to fulfill their obligations for them. While it is surely the case that commandments to regenerate serve to alter their behavior in a divinely accepted way, God did not design and mold these commandments so as to produce some predetermined end. Instruments must adapt to the end they are to achieve. There is no adaptability in a commandment. Even commandments to regenerate seldom produce as much obedience as demanded by the commandments themselves. If the intent of their design is to be instruments of unconditional obedience, then they are self-proclaimed failures. Now the new birth is always produced in perfection and completion, but obedience falls short of the divinely prescribed mark. The difference is in conditionality, not in mere instrumentality. One is done unconditionally, and is therefore perfected. The other involves a degree of conditionality, and is therefore less than perfect.

To show other problems with the unconditional theory, consider three men at church walking past the collection plate. The first man has been extraordinarily moved by the sermon just preached, and with the exuberance of a cleansed leper, he turns his billfold upside down and dumps its entire contents into the plate. The second man is being sifted by Satan and is suffering severely from a lapse of faith. His mind is anxious about debts he owes from purchasing a house and car that he really cannot afford. He reluctantly casts a five dollar bill into the plate. Both of the men just described had already been born again. The third man is of the reprobate class. He has been anxiously glancing at his watch during the sermon because he intends to catch a plane that afternoon destined for Las Vegas, where he intends to indulge himself at the blackjack table. He is very excited about the prospects of winning this time, but has not been very successful in the past, particularly when playing in an intoxicated state, which he, of course, considers to be an indispensable part of the pleasure. He recalls that the preacher mentioned something about God always being faithful and true, and he reasons from this that God is one who will surely pay His debts. Therefore, he decides to throw a five dollar bill into the plate also, considering it to be a good investment, and thinking that God will reward his generosity with good fortunes at the blackjack table. He then returns to the pew with a strengthened confidence similar to that of Pharaoh when he charged into the Red Sea.

Under the unconditional system, the decisions as to what would be given had actually been made entirely by God. Though the first two men perceived themselves as making the decisions, this was an illusion on their part. Their choice had nothing to do with it whatsoever. Their minds had really been influenced by the Holy Spirit to elicit the predetermined outcome. Each had been moved irresistibly to give at least as much as he did, and the indwelling corruption of the second man made it impossible for him to give an acceptable gift beyond what he was irresistibly moved to do. Any contribution beyond five dollars would have been conditionally given, and such would either be impossible in this system, or if possible, it would have been disregarded by God because of it being by works and not of "grace." Surely, none will deny that "*he which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully,*" (2Cor 9:6), so the blessings deriving from these gifts were also dictated by God without any consideration to the will of either man. As for the reprobate, he presumably gave

unconditionally also, because it would be a dubious claim that he has more freedom of will than those who are spiritual. I think the scenario I have described here is plausible, and I think I have reasonably represented the unconditional system, and have certainly tried to do so. I will now consider three questions:

1) How did regeneration benefit the first two men? This could be answered by saying their gifts were accepted of God whereas that of the unregenerate man was not. Also, it could be said that regeneration gives a proper heart so that the regenerate men in my example had an improved perspective as to what they were moved to do. So the unconditional system could offer reasonable answers here. However, if regeneration indeed gives a proper heart, then why is it that God does not accept the actions of that heart when it is left to act freely? It seems this view has God placing very little confidence in His own regenerative work, because in no degree does it have the regenerate heart being entrusted with participation in making decisions. The unconditional system answers the original question with some degree of reason, but also leaves something to be desired.

2) How did the regeneration of the first two men benefit other men? The five dollars given by the reprobate will buy no less than the five dollars given by the second man. Also, none would question the right or ability of God to move even an unregenerate man to give whatever God decided. So regeneration really contributed nothing to the controllability of either man or to the potential good that others might have experienced through this control. If it be objected that other men will be benefited by the general example and testimony of these two regenerate men, then I remind the objector that with the unconditional system, all such exemplary behavior and testimony is also decided by God, even as these contributions were decided by God. Hence, the benefit others might experience does not truly derive from regeneration. Regeneration is merely a potential conduit through which the benefit flows, though not necessarily, because the reprobate gave as much as the second regenerate man, and since God can cause even an ass to speak, and cause even Balaam to prophesy the truth, He can surely administer benefits to others even through the vilest of characters without any use of regeneration whatsoever. So we must conclude that under the unconditional system, regeneration is merely coincidental with whatever benefits others might receive from a regenerate man, because no decision for good is truly affected by the fact of his regeneration.

This might not seem altogether implausible at first, because it could be said that such a system eliminates any ambiguity as to the source of our benefits. They come from God, and are only administered to us through men. The unconditional system surely cannot be faulted for this feature. However, it is an undeniable scriptural fact that God does grant to men special abilities as gifts, and that by such abilities others are blessed. Therefore, Paul said:

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence... – Rom 12:6-8

Why would such gifts of ability be given under an unconditional system when they afford nothing to others that could have been accomplished without them? Since regeneration is the greatest of such gifts, the same question accompanies it. Under the unconditional system, any

act of love from one man to another is decided entirely by God and merely channeled through the first man to the second. The partially conditional system is far more sensible. It has both God and the first man practicing true love for the second man through the exercise of free choice. It has the first man being graciously and lovingly endowed with an ability by God, and then by his decision to exercise that ability, through what is also his God-given capacity to love, the second man is benefited, who may then praise God as the originator of his blessing, while appreciating the first man as being more than a mere puppet. In all of the regards in which we are to imitate Christ, none are greater than love, but how can a man truly love when every good action he performs for the benefit of others is completely decided apart from his own being? The unconditional system does not fare well under this question. All spiritual gifts, including regeneration, are given through the love of God that men might love others even as He loves.

Returning to the case of the two regenerate men who passed the collection plate, the next question is: What could account for the difference between the way in which the Holy Spirit irresistibly moved these two men? This could of course be attributed to sovereignty, but I think even advocates of the unconditional system will search for a reason. One answer could be that God intends to teach the first man that *“he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully,”* while He intends to teach the second man that *“he which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly.”* This is a very plausible answer, and none could reasonably deny that God does in fact teach His children through His word and the experiences of life. But what will be the implications of this teaching the *next time* these two men pass the collection plate? According to this system, their gifts then will also be unconditional. That is, the decisions as to what will be given shall have been made by God without any consideration to the will of either man. So what practical purpose was served by the lessons they were to have been taught on their first pass by the collection plate? Is it not the purpose of all teaching to improve decision-making ability between right and wrong, between wise and unwise, and between truth and error?

A small toddler is always carried across the road by the parent. As the child grows older, the parent teaches the child to look both ways before stepping into the road, then the child is taught to move hurriedly across the road. Of what use is this teaching if the parent forever carries the child across the road? The teaching is obviously purposed to enable the child to make proper decisions when confronted with the potential contingencies of crossing the road, and it presupposes that the child will be committed with the responsibility of making these decisions. When the child puts this teaching to use, the parent will watch it with a cautious and caring eye, being ready to spring to the rescue if needful; nonetheless, a degree of conditionality is afforded to the child. Now God surely teaches His children for the same purpose, but the unconditional system does not sensibly accommodate this fact. The system seems to collapse on this question.

Every sensible child of God feels entirely indebted to God for any good mark he attains. God has enabled him, directed him, strengthened him and taught him. At the same time, when the child of God fails, conscience and scriptures both tell him that the fault was not always due to inability but to neglect or misuse of ability. God gives ability. Men are helpless without it. God also assists in the use of that ability, directs that ability, and teaches that ability, but He does not do this to the exclusion of all conditionality.

Historical Views on the Question of Conditionality

“Time salvation” was not a term used by historical Baptists when referring to conversion, practical sanctification and assurance, yet they surely did believe in these latter concepts and explained them in a manner consistent with the principles set forth earlier. Hence, they held to a concept of time salvation even if they did not call it such. As to its “partial conditionality,” they did not commonly use this expression either, yet I think the concept is also clearly implied by what they wrote. After this subject became an issue near the end of the 19th century, Primitive Baptists expressed themselves clearly concerning it in the Fulton Confession of Faith in 1900, where they claimed agreement with the earlier English Baptists. I will consider this here.

The 1689 London Confession stated the following in its chapter on free will:

- 9.1. God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty and power of acting upon choice, that it is neither forced, nor by any necessity of nature determined to do good or evil.
- 9.2. 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 was unstable, so that he might fall from it.
- 9.3. 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.
- 9.4. 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 corruptions, he doth not perfectly, nor only will, that which is good, but doth also will that which is evil.
- 9.5. This will of man is made perfectly and immutably free to good alone in the state of glory only.

The Confession obviously used the word “convert” with reference to regeneration. It stated that man was created with a will and ability to do good and to please God; that he lost “ability of will to any spiritual good” in the fall, then in regeneration, God, “by His grace alone enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good.” The term “ability” and “freely to will” stand in stark opposition to the unconditional system. Nothing was said to distinguish the meanings of these terms as applied before the fall from the way they were applied to a regenerate man. The words implied conditionality formerly, and it is unreasonable to suppose they implied anything else thereafter.

This interpretation is corroborated by the chapter on good works:

- 16.3. Their ability to do good works is not all of themselves, but wholly from the Spirit of Christ; and that they may be enabled thereunto, besides the graces they have already received, there is necessary an actual influence of the same Holy Spirit, to work in them to will and to do of His good pleasure; yet they are not hereupon to grow negligent, as if they were not bound to perform any duty, unless upon a special motion of the Spirit, but they ought to be diligent in stirring up the grace of God that is in them.

Important words here are: "...they are not hereupon to grow negligent, as if they were not bound to perform any duty, unless upon a special motion of the Spirit, but they ought to be diligent in stirring up the grace of God that is in them." The latter part of this statement implies a degree of conditionality. The Fulton Confession commented upon it saying,

This section teaches the absolute necessity of the Spirit in all acceptable, gospel obedience. Yet we are not herein taught that obedience doth infallibly attend the presence and influence of the Holy Spirit, but its influence may be quenched, so that disobedience is rendered possible.

This would be an accurate interpretation except in the unlikely event that the London Confession intended that reality should be viewed in an unrealistic way. If regenerates are to be "diligent in stirring up the grace of God that is in them" and are not to wait upon a "special motion of the Spirit" to pursue their duty, then it follows that they are to view themselves as being capacitated by prior grace unto their duty without a special, compelling motion of the Spirit. If this is the scriptural way they are to view themselves, then we must assume this is in fact their case. The Bible is not designed to mislead the child of God.

The Fulton Confession conveyed the same principle in its comments on Chapter 18 of the London Confession (i.e. "Of the Assurance of Grace and Salvation") and related chapters:

These chapters do clearly set forth that the happiness, assurance, and comforts in this life in some measure, and even in a large measure, are contingent (Confession, Chapter III., Section 1) or made to depend upon the obedience of the children of God and their faithfulness to him. Also that a neglect of duty will bring to the disobedient distress and great grief.

When the whole of English Baptist literature is considered, it becomes evident that they sometimes used the word "salvation" in the sense of what I have called "time salvation." The same may be said of the London Confession in particular. Article 15.2 of that Confession is one of the most obvious places where this occurs. This article was discussed in my chapter on perseverance, where I also demonstrated that the Westminster and London Confessions made some distinction between "perseverance" and "preservation," and in making this distinction, they effectively said that one of these concepts is unconditional and the other is partly conditional. When the Fulton brethren said in the above quote, "These chapters do clearly set forth..." they meant the chapters in which this distinction was made, as well as chapters on other subjects. The Fulton brethren rightfully said this truth is "clearly" set forth, and while neither the Westminster Confession nor the London Confession made use of the term "time salvation," nor did they belabor the partial conditionality of the concept, this is easily explained by the fact that these truths represent the most obvious and intuitive forms of common sense. Indeed, part of the confusion caused by the term "time salvation" is that some people are made to expect something profound by it, when in fact it is simply a general label applied to familiar concepts.

Finally, the Fulton Confession conveyed its views most thoroughly in its Appendix:

We believe the Scriptures teach that there is a time salvation received by the heirs of God distinct from eternal salvation, which does depend upon their obedience. The people of God receive their

rewards for obedience in this life only. We believe that the ability of the Christian is the unconditional gift of God.

Besides the efficacious grace of God in the heart in regeneration, we need the company of God's Holy Spirit to comfort, lead, and bless us, which he has promised to give to every one that will ask him. (Luke 11:13.) The act of God necessary to our regeneration must in some sense be distinguished from his act necessary to our obedience. We are never commanded to be born again, but in hundreds of places we are called on to obey. We are passive in regeneration, but in obedience we are active. Regeneration is neither a vice nor a virtue; obedience is a virtue and disobedience a vice. Regeneration is wholly independent of the will. There could be no such a thing as obedience or disobedience independent of the will. Men do not neglect to be born again, but they do neglect their duty.

In section 5, Chapter XVI., we read: "We cannot by our best of works merit pardon of sin, or eternal life, at the hand of God," etc. They did not place obedience in the place of Christ, or his atonement, and so we believe it would be exceeding sinful to mention good works as essential to these ends, yet we believe there is an important use for good works aside from these ends. In Section 2, same chapter, they say of good works: "By them believers manifest their thankfulness, strengthen their assurance, edify their brethren, adorn the profession of the gospel, stop the mouths of the adversaries," etc.

We think these uses of good works scriptural. We hold that God's government of his people is moral. We hold, too, that conditionality is an essential element of moral government. We distinguish between God's government of mind and his government of matter.

I will finish this section with a quote from Sylvester Hassell, who obviously agreed with the sentiments expressed in the Fulton Confession. He expressly endorsed this Confession in several article written thereafter. The following was written in "The Gospel Messenger" in 1897, three years prior to Fulton:

All Primitive Baptists are agreed upon the unconditionality of our eternal salvation, and the inability of those who are dead in sin to render spiritual obedience to the law of God. Instead of repentance and faith being conditions prerequisite to salvation, we understand that they are the work of the Holy Spirit in the renewed heart, and are thus essential parts of salvation; and, until this spiritual renewal, the fallen child of Adam will love sin and hate holiness and continue in rebellion against God...

There are 1,422 "ifs" in the Bible – 830 in the Old Testament, and 592 in the New Testament; and these conditional sentences make up about one-fiftieth part of the Bible. Thus forty-nine fiftieths of the Scriptures are unconditional, and one fiftieth is conditional. All reverent minds must admit that this conditional part of the Scriptures, though comparatively small, has a real and true meaning.

It cannot be denied by any informed and honest man that such Scriptures as the following are conditional: "If His children forsake My law, I will visit their transgression with the rod, nevertheless My loving-kindness will I not utterly take from Him" (Psalms lxxxix. 30-33). "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land; but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." (Isa. i. 19, 20). "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (John xiii. 17). "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye, through the spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Rom. viii. 13). "How

shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?” (Heb. ii. 3). “If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, His son, cleanseth us from all sin.” (1 John i. 7). See, also, such scriptures as Lev. xxvi; Deut. iv. 29-31; vii. 12-26; xi. 13-32; xxviii.; Ezek. xviii., xxxiii. Not only is it certain that these Scriptures are conditional, but it is equally certain that the condition, introduced by “if,” necessarily precedes the conclusion, which would not take place unless the condition took place first. If the conclusion in these sentences means eternal punishment, then Arminianism is true; but either the text itself, or the context and other Scriptures, prove that the punishment or chastisement threatened in case of disobedience, is temporal and corrective, and not eternal and destructive, for God gives His children eternal life, and they shall never perish, and though their voluntary sins separate them from His face, nothing present or future can ever separate them from His love (John x. 28-30, Heb. xii.; Isa. lix. 2; Rom. viii. 28-39). Thus the conditionality of time salvation is just as certain as the truth of the eternal word of God. Baptists have always heretofore understood it so; nearly all Baptists understand it so now; and this truth is in perfect accordance with Christian experience. And if the living child of God, having the indwelling of the Spirit of life and grace, which makes him alive, is not able to obey heartily and sincerely, though imperfectly, the commandments of his Heavenly Father, his real state does not differ from that of those who are dead in sin. Of course he can do nothing spiritual or acceptable to God except by that Spirit of grace; but that Spirit dwells in him (John xiv. 16,17; Rom. viii. 9-17; 2 Cor. vi. 16; Eph. ii. 22); and he “can do all things through Christ, who strengthens him” (Philip. iv. 13); and he well knows and loves to confess that he has nothing good which he did not receive from God, and that without Christ he can do nothing, and that, by the grace of God, he is what he is – a poor, hell-deserving sinner, SAVED BY GRACE, a brand plucked from the eternal burning (2 Cor. iv. 7; James i. 17; John xv. 5; 1 Cor. xv. 10; 1 Tim. i. 15; Zech. iii. 2). And he knows just as well, both from the Scriptures and his own experience, that, in willful disobedience to God, he does not enjoy that spiritual comfort which he has in obedience. All the children of God are as assured of these truths as they are of their own existence; and bitter contention over them is wholly unnecessary, unprofitable, unwholesome, and subverting. The ENTIRE scriptural truth about any matter unites, comforts, and edifies the children of God; while a contention for a PART of the truth for the WHOLE truth divides, distresses, and overthrows them. Truth is spherical; we must look at it on all sides to understand it at all aright. Extremes are dangerous; let us avoid them as we would the verge of a fatal precipice. “Let our moderation be known unto all men – the Lord is at hand” (Philip. iv. 5)...

Man is not an unthinking, involuntary, irresponsible machine. He can and should be moral – it will be better for him in this world; but it is far better for him to be spiritual, and to be thus prepared for heaven.

An Examination of Romans 10:1

Many of the disputes on time salvation are not on *whether* it applies but about *where* it applies. No doubt, the single scripture that has been most discussed and debated in this respect has been:

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. – Rom 10:1-2

This text has long-intrigued all Christians, but especially those believing in the doctrines of election and predestination. Their question has been how a prayer for the eternal salvation of another could sensibly fit within this doctrinal framework. Scriptures state that God did not consult the will of man in deciding who He would save (Jn 1:13, Rom 9:16) and that His decisions to this effect were made before the foundation of the world (Eph 2:3-11, 2Tim 1:9-10).

Accordingly, they teach that human choice for God is the effect of the divine choice for the human (Ps 65:4, Mt 22:1-14, Jn 6:44, 1Jn 4:19, etc). This being the case, a prayer for the salvation of another could not possibly produce an outcome differing from God had already ordained. What then was the rationale for the prayer offered by Paul?

Arminians are less-troubled by this question because they of course deny election, but the text truly presents an even greater predicament to them. If God can be prevailed upon to overrule the freewill choices of those who otherwise would have rejected Him, then what is this but election? Since the Arminian position is untenable for this and other reasons, we can move on to the various Calvinistic explanations in search of an acceptable answer.

Many of Calvinistic inclination seek to resolve the problem by saying the scripture is a mere expression of emotion and not to be taken for its literal implications. Calvinists are like all sensible Christians in that they believe it is a commendable thing to pray for repentance and conversion in others, but concede that if such prayers are offered for non-elect, then these prayers are *in effect* requests for eternal salvation. This is because nothing short of regeneration could genuinely produce the requested end. Still, such prayers are considered commendable because they are done with good intent, and in innocent ignorance of the fact they are contrary to the decrees of God. Many will say this is exactly what Paul did in the prayer above.

But this raises a very different question, and one having serious implications: Would a *divinely-inspired apostle* pray such a prayer and present it to us *in the sacred text* as a logical action? If we have a verse in the Bible that presents itself as being literal and logical in its implications, but is in fact a mere expression of human emotion, then one must wonder where else the Bible did such things? This exposes us to some very disturbing possibilities. Perhaps doctrines held by the church for centuries are actually wrong, having been based on scriptures that were in fact mere expressions of human emotion and written in innocent ignorance! This is clearly unacceptable. Nothing could be more dubious than the supposition that a man could be deceived into doctrinal error by investing too much confidence in the word of God. It should therefore be obvious that the case at hand has very different implications than that of a mother praying for repentance in her rebellious son, who, unbeknownst to her, is of the non-elect.

This problem has led some to resort to ideas even more bizarre. Their claim is that God's logic is different from ours, so that what seems contradictory to man can be consistent with God. It is upon this basis they presume to reconcile the text. But if a contradiction to man can be consistent to God, then one must wonder if the reverse could be true, i.e. that what is consistent with man could be a contradiction to God. If so, then Christians should perhaps argue for a prohibition on all thinking! The dubious nature of this can be further seen in the fact that it requires some degree of logic to demonstrate a contradiction. So suppose we undertook to show that a consistent proposition to God is a contradictory proposition to man, then we must allow for the possibility that the logic we used to demonstrate the contradiction is not also God's logic. This leaves us exposed to the dubious conclusion that God's logic could be different from man's logic when measured by man's logic, but equal to man's logic when measured by God's logic!

There is no better measure of God's logic than the one provided by Jesus Christ Himself. Never do we find the Son of God endorsing any contradiction, absurdity or impracticality. Further, no

scriptural teacher scathed men more for inconsistency and absurdity than Jesus Christ Himself. Also, while we find that He commonly adduced scripture in His defense, it is also true that in many of His arguments He quoted no scripture at all, but reasoned entirely from logic. A journey through the book of Matthew alone discloses a formidable list of such instances: Mt 9:4-6, 15-17, 10:24-31, 11:16-19, 12:11-12, 12:25-28, 18:21-35, 20:13-15, 21:28-31, 23:16-26, 25:26-27, 26:10, 26:52-55.

The same sensible approach was used by the Savior in all He taught concerning prayer – a subject wherein He was also the most thorough of all scriptural teachers. Given His extensive treatment of the subject, there is surely some significance to the fact that *not once* did He ever direct us to pray that another be delivered from hell, or that another be elected, regenerated, justified, etc. There should be no surprise in this given that He handled and completed this important business *Himself* (Jn 17).

Then there is a third idea that also errs, but has found plausibility with many. It faithfully affirms what scriptures say about eternal salvation being predestined for unconditionally elected people, but claims salvation is obtained by human means, and that God has predestined both the end and the means. It says that a prayer by one man for the salvation of another could in fact be such a means. This is a common argument, and is applied not only to prayer but to all other *alleged* means to eternal salvation. It is thought by some to be a key to reconciling the sovereignty of God and human free will. In reply to this:

1) The argument surely does not reconcile divine sovereignty and human free will for the simple reason that two things can never be reconciled when one of them is essentially denied. This argument denies free will because it says humans do not truly act upon choice when praying for salvation in others, or when executing any of the purported means of salvation. Rather, they are only doing what God had already decided and predestined them to do. There is no problem in asserting that God can do such things, but it is disingenuous to represent such as reconciliations of sovereignty and free will. Arminians also pretend to reconcile these things, but in truth they only deny that sovereignty is really “sovereignty” or that predestination is truly “predestination.” This argument fares no better, because it denies that free will is really “free will.”

2) Scriptures not only deny that salvation is *by* man, they also deny it is *of* man (Jn 1:13, Rom 9:16). Now if men were saved to heaven by means of prayers offered by other men, then there would be an undeniable sense in which these claims would be false.

3) But the greatest problem with this position is that it fails to consider that the ultimate objective in eternal salvation is the demonstration of God’s love, mercy and grace. This being the case, it is a dubious claim that God would set up a system where the eternal salvation of one man was made to swing on the prayer of another. Such a system falls short of displaying His full glory because it leaves the appearance that the first man received salvation, not because God loved him, but because his praying brother loved him, and because God had sufficient regard to the praying brother to answer his prayer. Indeed, the appearance is that God would have been content to damn the first man had it not been for the prayer offered by the second.

Now one might reply that the same argument could be cast against any prayer made in behalf of another. So, for example, if one man were to pray that God heal another man of a physical infirmity, then might we object that such a prayer would insinuate that the sick man were loved of his praying brother more than he were loved of God? But this question ignores the fact that eternal salvation is repeatedly represented in scripture as the *basis* and *standard* of all our love and care for others (Rom 14:9-13, 15:1-3, 2Cor 8:8-9, Eph 4:31-32, 5:25, Col 3:12-14, 1Tim 2:1-6, Tit:3:1-8, Heb 2:10, Js 2:5-9, 1Pet 2:19-25, 3:17-18, 1Jn 3:1-3, 3:16). Thus, I am to love my brother and pray for his infirmities *because* God has loved me and saved me from hell to heaven. Now that which is a standard must be independent of the thing it measures or else it ceases to be a standard. When one thing serves as a basis for a second, the second cannot be a cause or means unto the first. If human love is to look to eternal salvation as its mark, then eternal salvation must have its basis in something higher than human love. This is why means-aided forms of Calvinism are hardly distinguishable from Arminianism in respect to the glory they give to God. They have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof. If our salvation in Christ is the ultimate and eternal standard of love, then it must be fundamentally different from any other kindness that might be received of Him via the love and prayer of men. It is distinguished in that it is “*not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God,*” (Jn 1:13).

Proper Definitions of “Saved” and “Israel”

A sensible interpretation of Rom 10:1 requires that proper definitions be assigned to its terms. The terms “saved” and “Israel” are particularly important because contextual evidence strongly indicates these terms do not mean what many readers initially assume. While “saved” in modern usage nearly always means “saved to heaven,” I have already shown this definition will not always work in the Bible. To suppose it means this in Romans 10:1 invariably leads to a logical train wreck. This can be seen in what we have already presented, though we have hardly begun to note the logical and theological problems this assumption produces. To understand that Paul did not mean “saved to heaven,” one should consider the entire context of the subject being treated, beginning with Romans 9:1 and continuing through the end of Romans 11. Upon doing this, it will be found that “Israel” is also used with a special definition wherein it means only those descendents of Abraham who are the eternal *elect* of God. Since it is understood these will all be saved to heaven, Paul’s prayer for their salvation must have intended something else. It was a prayer for their deliverance in *temporal* matters, not a prayer for their eternal salvation.

As to the term “Israel,” this must be limited here to eternal elect for numerous reasons:

1) Paul from the very outset defined “Israel” such that it could not mean anything else:

Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. – Rom 9:6-8

It is a good writer that begins by defining his terms. Paul here defined “Israel” as he intended to use the term in what followed. According to this definition, “Israel” means the descendents of

Abraham who are counted as “*the children of the promise*” or as “*the children of God.*” This observation raises two very important points that I think are commonly misunderstood:

First, by “Israel” Paul did not mean Gentiles, whether carnal or spiritual. As indicated by the opening verses of chapter 9, he meant those who were his countrymen, his kinsmen according to the flesh; those to whom the Law had been given and those who had descended from the fathers (i.e. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob). This will explain why Paul will hereafter consistently maintain a distinction between “Israel” and the Gentiles.

Second, Paul did not here give us two alternative definitions of “Israel.” He gave only one. He did not say there is land-promise Israel versus a spiritual-promise Israel, nor an Israel by race versus an Israel by grace, nor did he say there is a natural Israel versus a spiritual Israel. Rather, he said there is a *true* Israel and there is a *false* one. Accordingly, in what follows, when he refers to “Israel” he does mean a land-promise Israel, nor an Israel by race, nor a natural Israel, because these are not “Israel” under his explicitly-specified definition of the word. The same idea is corroborated elsewhere. For example, in the 2nd chapter he wrote, “*For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly...*” (2:28). Observe he did not say the outward Jew is merely a Jew in a natural sense. He said he is not a Jew at all. Then in what followed in the 9th chapter, he illustrated the case of these pseudo-Jews with Ishmael and Esau – men who were not Jews in *any* sense of the word. The same pattern can also be seen in Rev 2:9 and 3:9, where those claiming to be Jews on account of natural lineage were declared to be no Jews at all.

While the term “Israel” may be used in varied ways both in common speech and in the Bible, Paul here defined the term by its most precise scriptural meaning. The point he made was that under this definition, “Israel” cannot include any so-called Jew apart from those who are the eternal elect of God. One can see from the cases of Ishmael and Esau that the term cannot be defined in terms of fleshly descent. This is especially true of Esau, who was the twin of his brother Jacob, yet was not counted as a Jew. So what actually defined the term? Paul answered it was defined altogether by the sovereign choice God: “*They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.*”

But did God define one Israel or two? Many Christians would not hesitate to say two. They would say there were Jews who were under the land promises, or temporal promises concerning the land of Canaan, then there were other Jews who were under both these promises and the spiritual promises, or the promises concerning Christ, eternal salvation, resurrection, etc. The problem with this reasoning is that when we observed the Old Testament Jew behaving as carnal, condemned people do – in unbelief and rejection of God and His word – then we also saw God denying them the land and driving them from it. Further, His wrath was poured out on them, and their case became no better than that of the rebellious Gentile. Now since eternally condemned people are by their very nature children of wrath, there was no practicable sense in which a Jew could persist under the land promises without also being under the spiritual ones. This will explain why Paul never delineated between these promises. When speaking of Israel, they were simply the ones to whom the promises pertained (vs 4) and were therefore called “the children of promise” (vs 8). They were not children of one kind of promise or another kind of promise, but were under *all* the promises that God made to Abraham. As for those non-elect, so-called “Jews” in the Old Testament era who benefited from the land along with the others, this was not

because God had promised it to them, but because they were *free riders*. In truth, they had no more title to the promises made to Abraham than did Ishmael or Esau.

Hence, there is a false Israel and a true one. The false Israel included the non-elect element of that nation. The true Israel included the eternal elect only, but these could be classified in two ways: professors and non-professors of Christ. So we have a three-fold division in nominal Israel. In my opinion, a primary reason these chapters are misunderstood is because the readers attempt to impose a two-fold division, namely of professors versus hell-bound. This is an oversimplification of the high mystery being explained by the Apostle, and one which renders sensible interpretation of him impossible.

Now all this leads to a question that is crucial to our ultimate conclusion: Would Paul so painstakingly define “Israel” at the beginning of his discourse only to cast the definition aside in the remainder of what he had to say? This is obviously unlikely, and I will present much more evidence that in fact he did not.

2) Paul commended the zeal of these Jews, though he complained it was not according to knowledge. Some have dismissed this zeal as being no mark of spirituality because even the wickedest of men are capable of religious zeal. However, this fails to consider that the Bible always condemns zeal toward false gods and false religions. Jesus Himself blasted even the zeal of the wicked Jews, saying, “...ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves,” (Mt 23:15). Now the inspired apostle surely would not have commended what the Savior condemned. The zeal he noted here must have been something meaningful.

3) When answering his own question as to whether God had cast Israel away, Paul replied “*God forbid.*” Paul could not have made this statement had they been destined to hell.

Some will claim this text only asserts that the nation in general had not been cast away, and will persist in asserting that the unconverted element of that generation were uniformly in a state of eternal damnation. There are several points in reply to this:

a) There is nothing in any of these chapters to indicate that Paul was merely speaking of a nation in abstract. His concerns were stated in very personal terms. The heaviness of his heart was for his countrymen, kinsmen, etc. Repeatedly does he refer to Israel with terms like “them,” “they” and “their.” Never does he refer to Israel with “it” or “she,” as would be expected if he only meant the nation in general.

b) By “Israel” Paul cannot mean the nation in general because his explanation in 9:6 essentially said that “Israel” *cannot* be the nation in general by any definition that is meaningful to God.

c) The warning to the Gentiles to be merciful to the Jews because of the symmetry of their cases (11:30-31) shows that Paul was considering the Jews as individuals and not as a general nation. There is no symmetry between any Gentile nation and the Jewish

nation. God did for the latter what He never did for any of the former. This symmetry exists only in the matter of personal salvation.

d) Consistently, the Jews who were blinded, unbelieving, disobedient, enemies of the gospel, etc, were one and the same with the Jews who were beloved, to be shown mercy, delivered, cleansed, saved, etc. There is nothing to suggest that those of the former character made up one group while those of the latter made up another, and much of the chapter is rendered senseless if the groups are different. For example, what need is there to precaution the Gentiles to view them mercifully if the body of Jews who are ultimately to be saved excluded the Jews who were then alive and included only future Jews of a higher character? How could Gentiles show mercy to a generation of Jews that did not even exist and would not exist until thousands of years after those Gentile were dead?

e) When Peter spoke to believing Jews in his own times, he said of them: *“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy,”* (1Pet 2:9-11). These words were no doubt addressed to elect Jews, yet Peter said they were *“in time past were not a people.”* This statement is an allusion to Hos 1:9 where God had rejected the Jews as being His people. But He left them with the promise: *“Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God,”* (vs 10). So Hosea said that even the elect among the Jews would be rejected to the extent that God would say of them, *“Ye are not my people...”* This rejection could only be in a temporal sense, yet it was of such severe consequence that anyone observing them would have had every reason to conclude they were non-elect. We know they were in fact elect only because the Holy Spirit made us privy via the inspired text to the exceptional nature of the case.

4) These warnings to the Gentile church would serve no practical purpose unless they were warnings against the supposition that all unconverted Jews are eternally damned. The reason is that there is no evidence anywhere in the New Testament of anti-Semitic tendencies in the early Gentile church. It did in fact have the opposite problem, and has continued with this problem unto the present day. The prevalent tendency of the Gentile church has been to adore the Jews, believe the Jews and imitate the Jews. This has proven a stumbling-block to many Gentiles; consequently, numerous scriptures in the New Testament that were purposed to correct them in this respect. The only anti-Jewish error to which the Roman church would have been predisposed is the assumption that all unconverted Jews are hell-bound. They would have been vulnerable to this idea because, under ordinary rules, believers are saved and unbelievers are damned. But Paul warned them that the case being considered involved a special operation of God in which the ordinary rules do not altogether apply.

5) The Jews under consideration were “cut off” (vs 22) and “cast away” (vs 15). This must either be in a temporal sense or in an eternal one. As none believing the doctrines of grace allow the latter, the temporal sense must be meant. This implies the salvation they needed was in a

temporal sense also, because being “cut off” and “cast away” versus being “saved” were presented as the flipside of each other.

6) Verse 11:2 said the Jews had not been cast away but verse 15 said they had. Verse 11 denied that they had fallen but verse 12 affirmed it. Verse 28 implied they were elect but verse 7 implied they were not. Verse 9:25 said the Jews are not God’s people, but then the same verse calls them the children of the living God. Hence, we have repeated contradictions unless we understand there is one sense in which these things are true but another sense in which they are not. People who are damned to hell are in *every* sense cast away, fallen and non-elect. They are the objects of “*indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish*” (2:8-9). The only sensible way to reconcile these claims is to understand that in a temporal sense Israel had fallen but in the eternal sense they had not.

7) In his analogy of the olive tree, Paul explained that the Jews were the natural branches of the tree, and that they had been cut off so that the wild branches representing the Gentiles could be grafted in. But he then warned this could be reversed, and that the Jews, being the natural branches, could be more readily grafted back than had been done with the Gentiles. Now anyone believing in salvation by grace should see it is absurd to suppose that it is easier to eternally save a Jew than a Gentile, or easier to eternally save a Gentile than a Jew. The clear meaning is that if Gentiles could be converted by means of a Jewish book, then much more could Jews be converted by their own book once their blindness was removed. The issue at hand is gospel conversion, not eternal salvation.

8) These were Jews who might be provoked by jealousy (“emulation”) unto salvation. This salvation is either eternal or temporal. The idea that anyone could be moved to eternal salvation by means of racial jealousy is absurd, so a temporal salvation must be meant.

9) The blinding of the Jews by God was either by permission or by intervention or by both. It is difficult to deny that intervention was involved given what scriptures said (Mt 13:10-15, Jn 9:39, Rom 11:8, etc). But no intervention would be needful in the case of carnal men since they are spiritually blind by nature (Jn 8:43-47, Jn 10:26, 1Cor 2:14, Rom 8:5-8).

10) Paul rejected the idea that the stumbling occasioned by this blindness implied their final fall, but there is no sensible way to deny the fall of those who are finally condemned to hell.

11) The “firstfruit” mentioned in verse 16 was very likely the converted remnant among the Jews in the New Testament church (Rom 8:23, 16:5, 1Cor 16:5, Js 1:18). Who then is the “lump?” Surely not the entire nation, nor could it be the pseudo-Israel exposed in chapter 9. So there must have been Jews apart from the firstfruit, and therefore apart from the converted, who would also be saved eternally.

12) In 11:25 Paul declared that, “*All Israel shall be saved...*” This cannot be limited to the converted remnant then in Israel because the text would assert nothing beyond what was already assumed. It should also be apparent that “Israel” cannot be sensibly defined here apart from how Paul defined the term in chapter 9. So we see that at both the beginning of his discourse and at the end, “Israel” can only refer to eternal elect. This should suggest to any reasonable mind that

the term had the same meaning at all intervening points. “Israel” in these three chapters means *God’s eternal elect among the seed of Abraham*.

Further, when he said all Israel shall be saved, his meaning could not be confined to some future generation of Jews. That is, it could not exclude all unconverted Jews in his own times. This can be seen in what he said next:

For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. – Rom 11:30-33

Observe Paul’s use of the word “now.” When he spoke of all Israel being saved, his meaning embraced even unconverted Jews of his own times. “*Even so have these also **now** not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy.*” Hence, even the unconverted “Israel” that then existed is to be the object of divine mercy.

Consider also Paul’s statement: “*As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes,*” (Rom 11:28-29). Observe He did not say that, concerning the gospel, *some of them* are enemies, but, as touching the election, *other of them* are beloved. Accordingly, he said nothing here to suggest that the enemies were of one generation but the beloved were of another, nor does he do this anywhere in his discourse. Rather, the ones cast away were the same with the ones to be received; the branches broken off were the same with the branches to be grafted back again, and the ones who were enemies were the same with the ones who were beloved. The fact they had been elected and beloved for the sake of their forefathers shows the sense in which they cannot persist in a cast away state. The meaning is that, given the promises made to their forefathers, it is impossible for their *temporal* state to remain one of disfavor and darkness. This again shows the issue is their temporal standing, not their eternal salvation. The idea that they were to be eternally saved on account of their forefathers is so far-fetched that both Calvinists and Arminians would reject it as heresy.

The Case of Israel is Exceptional

Notwithstanding the prodigious evidence that opposes them, most Bible commentators assume that all unconverted Jews from Paul’s times until today are eternally damned. Hence, they also conclude that the prayer of Rom 10:1 was a prayer for eternal salvation. The reason for their conclusion is they fear that any other interpretation would be in contradiction to the general scriptural rule that unbelievers are damned. This fear is furthered by the fact that the case of the Jews cannot be dismissed to ignorance. They were unconverted notwithstanding the fact they had access to Bibles and had heard the gospel preached. Still, the commentators were wrong to draw this conclusion because the Bible did not leave them to draw *any* conclusion on this matter; rather, Paul expressly stated it himself:

And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. For

as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. – Rom 11:26-32

To conclude that the unconverted Jews cannot be the objects of eternal mercy on account of their unbelief is, in this special case, a direct contradiction to the final sentence of the above quote. Further, the commentators should have observed what follows:

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen. – Rom 11:33-12:1

These words convey the distinct impression that the case being considered was exceptional, even to the point of being mysterious. It was a case where the ordinary rules did not pertain. It is not only the prerogative of Sovereign God to make the rules, but to also preempt those rules wherever He sees fit. His rules state that believers are saved and unbelievers are damned, but this does not make him prisoner to such. He as resolutely warned all objectors, *“I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion,”* (Rom 9:15). His rules also dictate that when an axe-head is cast into a river it will sink. Anyone who expects it to do anything else is a likely fool, and anyone who preaches it will do anything else is a likely deceiver. But God can preempt this rule and cause an axe-head to swim (2Ki 6:6). Now the rule of scripture is that believers obtain mercy and unbelievers do not, but Rom 11:32 declares that unbelievers obtain mercy, clearly showing that the case being considered is one where Sovereign God has preempted the rule.

The inapplicability of the ordinary rules follows from the fact that God had blinded the Jews. In the words of Jesus Himself, it was done *“lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them,”* (Mt 13:15). While the divine motivation for this is partly bound up in mystery, Paul explained that *“through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy,”* (Rom 11:11). Perhaps this explains why Christianity is a religion that embraces, and is embraced by, all nations of the Gentile world, whereas most other religions are confined to races and tribes. Christianity might have been like other religions in this respect had the Jews remained at the forefront of the religion. We can only speculate about such things. But we are far less speculative in saying that had it not been for the blinding, so that the Jews had been left on equal footing with Gentiles, then the Jews would have been no less disposed to believe on Christ (Isa 6:9-12, Mt 13:15, Jn 12:39-49). Hence, Paul exhorts the Gentiles to view them mercifully, and warns: *“For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?”* (Rom 11:24-25). This blinding of the Jews was a special act of God. It should not be assumed that God does the same thing among the Gentiles. Such an assumption contradicts Paul’s assertion that the Jews were blinded for the very purpose of enlightening the Gentile people.

“The Word is Nigh Thee”

However, the case of the non-professing Jews may have been in greater compliance with what the Bible has said about believers and unbelievers than appearance would suggest. In his appeal to them in 10:8, Paul said, *“The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart...”* This suggests that, while they were not open professors, their hearts were more disposed toward Christ than appearance would have it. As John said, *“Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God,”* (Jn 12:42-44). If such was the case for the Jewish leaders, then much more would it have been the case for the common people (Mt 12:37). Belief and unbelief are ideological opposites serving to define an intervening continuum where humans actually dwell. Our own experience tells us this. The Jews under consideration fell short of a degree of conviction that would lead to visible profession, but neither were they to be ranked among the hardened hearts that characterized those who were Israel in appearance but not Israel in fact.

Paul’s statement to the Jews that *“the word is nigh thee...”* carries to another point of great importance. This statement was an adaptation of Dt 30:11-14 where Moses told Israel of the blessings they would receive in following the Lord, but also warned of the misery, loss and persecution they would endure if they departed from Him. He said their misery would be such that in the morning they would long for it to be evening, but in the evening they would pray for it to be morning (28:67). He said their sufferings would be so great that even Gentiles would be surprised at them, and would question within themselves why the Lord would deal so severely with His people (29:24). We can definitely see in retrospect the truth of these warnings, and all of us among the Gentiles must confess that we have asked the very question that Moses predicted of us. No nation of people has suffered like the Jews. Now Paul was acutely aware of these things when he alluded to what Moses said. These facts raise some important points:

First, the need of temporal salvation to the Jew was a very real and grave matter. If Paul could see through the eye of prophecy the unspeakable miseries his people would endure at the hands of the Romans, Nazis, etc, then he need not see them as eternally condemned to have continual heaviness and sorrow in his heart for them.

Second, when we witness the sufferings of the Jews and compare it to the blessings we have received, we should infer from this where those blessings derived. They cannot be owing to a more honorable legacy, because we came from heathen forefathers and are very inferior to the Jews in this respect. Nor can they be attributed to higher intellect or greater learning, because we have had no greater teacher than the Jewish writers of the Bible. Nor can they be owing to racial superiority in other respects. All races who have made this assumption were soon humiliated by the hand of providence. Nor are they owing to our good works, because the Jews were as diligent as any in this respect. The mercy we have experienced and the bountiful blessings we have received, whether in time or eternity, can only be explained by our graciously-given standing in Jesus Christ. We can be very sure the Lord intended for us to learn this lesson upon beholding the case of the Jews.

Third, when we witness the incomprehensible sufferings of this people, particularly as it has existed even in our modern times in the concentration camps and gas chambers of Europe, and when we see the insane hatred with which they are held by the vilest of hell-bound men – to the extent that even now there are many who threaten the very annihilation of the Jews – then we are compelled to ask: Do the scriptures lead us to expect such contempt and persecution toward those who are the children of this world? *“If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you,”* (Jn 15:19). When we see people who are continually led as sheep to the slaughter, is this reason to suppose they are the children of the devil? *“As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter,”* (Rom 8:36). Did not the scriptures say of the wicked: *“They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men?”* (Ps 73:5-6). Who will say of the Jews at Auschwitz: *“Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish?”* (Ps 73:7). Or will Abraham say to such people what he did to the condemned rich man: *“Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented?”* (Lk 16:25). The Lord Himself said, *“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent,”* (Rev 3:19). Therefore, when we saw that the Jews have been perhaps the most divinely-chastened people on earth, were we supposed to conclude they are non-elect? The burden felt by Paul for the Jewish people was identical to the burden that Jesus Himself felt when He lamented over Jerusalem, saying:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. – Mt 23:37-24:1

This highly misunderstood and highly misquoted text did not have Jesus saying “how oft would I have gathered *thee*,” as though it were the entire city He sought. Rather, His desire was to gather “*thy children*” – by which He meant what Paul called “*the children of promise*.” Jesus did not mean those wicked vipers who had seized upon every opportunity to silence, persecute or kill every prophet He sent, and who He denounced as being of their father the Devil, and who Paul declared to be no part of true Israel. Further, Jesus claimed these children had not been gathered because “*ye would not*.” He did not say *they* would not, but it was the city itself, as represented by its wicked leaders, who had “*shut up the kingdom of heaven against men*,” not entering it themselves, nor suffering others to enter when they would have otherwise done so (Mt 23:13).

John Gill very aptly said of this text in his commentary:

Our Lord is to be understood not of his divine will, as God, to gather the people of the Jews internally, by his Spirit and grace, to himself; for all those whom Christ would gather, in this sense, were gathered, notwithstanding all the opposition made by the rulers of the people; but of his human affection and will, as a man, and a minister, to gather them to him externally, by, and under the ministry of his word, to hear him preach; so as that they might be brought to a conviction of, and an assent unto him as the Messiah; which, though it might fall short of faith in him, would have been sufficient to have preserved them from temporal ruin, threatened to their city and temple, in the following verse...

And it is to be observed, that the persons whom Christ would have gathered, are not represented as being unwilling to be gathered; but their rulers were not willing that they should, and be made proselytes to him, and come under his wings. It is not said, "how often would I have gathered you, and you would not!" nor, "I would have gathered Jerusalem, and she would not"; nor, "I would have gathered thy children, and they would not"; but, "how often would I have gathered thy children, and ye would not!" Which observation alone is sufficient to destroy the argument founded on this passage in favour of free will...

The common people seemed inclined to attend his ministry, as appears from the vast crowds, which, at different times and places, followed him; but the chief priests, and rulers, did all they could to hinder the collection of them to him, and their belief in him as the Messiah; by traducing his character, miracles, and doctrines, and by menacing the people with curses, and excommunications, making a law, that whoever confessed him should be turned out of the synagogue.

Hence, Gill considered these Jews who Jesus distinguished as "children" to be the elect of God, and said they were surely gathered *internally* by the irresistible workings of the Holy Spirit, but that they had not been gathered *externally* under the ministry of the word. It was on this account that Jesus lamented their case, and even wept for them. However, Jesus expressly stated the reason for His sorrow: "*For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation,*" (Lk 19:43-44). Thus, as Gill said, His concern was for their *temporal* ruin. As terrible as this proved to be, it would not be worthy of mention against a backdrop of eternal damnation.

The distinction made by Gill between internal versus external gathering is the very point that must be understood to make sense of Romans 10:1. The power of God is irresistibly imposed in the matter of regeneration, or in what Gill called internal gathering. We need not have any anxiety about whether God will gather His people in this sense. But external gathering, or what we more commonly call "gospel conversion," is a different matter. Jesus said, "*The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest,*" Mt (9:37-38). The clear implication of this text is that if we do not care and do not pray, then our evangelical endeavors will not reach all they should.

It is also evident that the wickedness of man can serve as an obstacle to gospel conversion. Hence, Jesus said of the wicked Jews, "*Ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men...*" (Mt 23:13), and Paul said that such were guilty of "*Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved...*" (1Thess 2:16). So he elsewhere said, "*Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you: And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith,*" (2Thes 3:1-2). Therefore, while God works powerfully in the dispersal of the preached word, He does not necessarily displace all effects of human will, effort and opposition. This is why it is needful that men pray. The prayers described here were not mere releases of emotion, nor accommodations to seemingly-contradictory forms of divine logic, nor exercises in spiritual calisthenics, nor mere obligatory expressions of goodwill; rather, they served to effect *real change*. Hence, Paul thanked the Philippians for their prayers in behalf of his ministry, saying, "*For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer...*" (Php 1:19). Again, he

said to the Corinthians, *“Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us; Ye also helping together by prayer for us...”* (2Cor 1:10-12).

These considerations serve to explain Romans 10:1. Paul’s prayer was for the elect element of nominal Israel. It was not a prayer that they be elected, regenerated, resurrected, etc, but a prayer that they be converted to the truth and thereby spared the severe divine chastisements that would befall them for their disobedience. In short, it was a prayer for their “time salvation” as defined in this chapter. Long before, Moses had said that God would raise a prophet in their midst like unto himself, and said, *“And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him,”* (Dt 18:19). Given their confinement and death in the wilderness and other sufferings for their rebellion against Moses, his warning here with respect to Christ was especially foreboding. This made prayer in their behalf an urgent matter even if not an eternal matter.

Now since no man in heaven shall lack for the things embraced in time salvation, we should see that Paul’s prayer, far from being a mere vain, uninspired expression of human emotion, was instead uttered from a heart under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God, whose intent it was to grant the thing requested: *“And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob,”* (Rom 11:26).

“PRESERVATION” VERSUS “PERSEVERANCE”

All Primitive Baptists believe the elect will be regenerated in time and maintained in this state so that none will finally be lost. The word generally used to describe this doctrine is “preservation.” In former times, the doctrine was commonly called “perseverance.” As I will show shortly, “perseverance” primarily meant in former times what “preservation” means today. However, the terms have somewhat diverged in meaning over time, and failure to recognize this has been the occasion of confusion. Most today think of “preservation” as being something that is done *to* a man, whereas they think of “perseverance” as something that is done *by* a man. Now questions concerning what children of God will do, always do, and never do, have always been, and will remain, points of debate, so this causes the term “perseverance” to inherit the same controversy. The term “preservation” is more definitive and subject to less confusion.

The term “preservation” is also to be preferred because of its use in scripture. “Perseverance” occurs only once in the Bible (Eph 6:18), and it is there applied in a commandment to persistence in prayer. On the other hand, the Bible repeatedly uses “preservation” in the same sense in which theology uses it. It is found in 1Thes 5:23, 2Tim 4:18, and Jude 1:1. The Greek word translated as “preserved” is also found in Jn 17:11 (“keep”) and 1Pet 1:4 (“reserved”). Against this objection it could be replied that theology uses other terms that either have no scriptural precedent or are used in scripture with a different meaning. Such terms include “sovereignty,” “decree” and “depravity.” Still, most would agree it is best to abide by scriptural terms where feasible because they are less subject to confusion, even if not altogether immune to it.

However, some who passionately oppose “perseverance” are standing guard over personal doctrinal anomalies that commonly take some form of near-universalism. Since there are millions in the world who have not “persevered” in Christ in any plausible sense of the term, the word stands very opposed to the doctrinal prejudices of those having such tendencies. In favoring “preservation” over “perseverance,” one certainly should not wish to endorse these types of errors. Consequently, I will end this chapter with a discussion of the relevant ideas that are commonly intended by “perseverance.” Before doing this, I will demonstrate that in ancient literature this term primarily intended what we mean by “preservation” today, and will then discuss doctrinal errors deriving from failure to understand or respect this fact.

The Terminology of the London and Westminster Confessions

The Westminster Confession reverses the definitions that people today apply to “perseverance” and “preservation.” This distinction also applies to the 1689 London Baptist Confession because it was based on the Westminster. Objections to these Confessions have sometimes been provoked by failure to notice these facts. When the Westminster speaks of “perseverance,” it refers to what God does *infallibly* for the elect and to the elect. But when it speaks of “preservation,” it refers to what God does through the elect, but not to the exclusion of their will; consequently, their definition of “preservation” partly depends on active obedience and is *potentially fallible*. When it speaks of “perseverance,” it means what people today call “preservation,” and when it speaks of “preservation,” it means what people now call “perseverance.” The Confessions appears to have been deliberate in this matter.

The entire Westminster chapter on the subject is included below. Observe how it switches from “perseverance” in the first two articles to “preservation” in the third:

17.1 They, whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally, nor finally, fall away from the state of grace: but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.

17.2. This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ; the abiding of the Spirit, and of the seed of God within them; and the nature of the covenant of grace: from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof.

17.3. Nevertheless, they may, through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins; and, for a time, continue therein: whereby they incur God’s displeasure, and grieve His Holy Spirit, come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts, have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded, hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves.

When defining “perseverance” in the first two articles, the Confession considers what God does infallibly for man and to man. When the first article speaks of God “sanctifying” the elect through His Spirit, this refers to regeneration, as is also the case in other ancient literature. Their chapter on sanctification will show this to be true. In modern terminology, “sanctification” tends to refer to the spiritual life of a man *after* he has been regenerated. The second article says “perseverance” does not depend upon free will, but the third article switches to the term “preservation” and speaks of men *neglecting* the means of their preservation, thereby suggesting that preservation does depend partly upon free will and active obedience. Accordingly, the Confession speaks of perseverance as being a more direct act of God than preservation because it speaks of *means* being used in preservation but never does it say this of perseverance. Also, it elsewhere speaks of the *means* to *assurance*, and the Confession definitely makes assurance to be the effect of preservation. Now these uses of “perseverance” and “preservation” are reversed from what people expect today.

The Baptists formed their first article by taking the Westminster article and combining it with an article of the earlier 1646 London Baptist Confession. This somewhat obscured the distinction made in the Westminster between perseverance and preservation, but the distinction remained pronounced here and elsewhere. The Baptist statement was:

17.1. Those whom God hath accepted in the beloved, effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit, and given the precious faith of His elect unto, can neither totally nor finally fall from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved, seeing the gifts and callings of God are without repentance, whence He still begets and nourisheth in them faith, repentance, love, joy, hope, and all the graces of the Spirit unto immortality; and though many storms and floods arise and beat against them, yet they shall never be able to take them off that foundation and rock which by faith they are fastened upon; notwithstanding, through unbelief and the temptations of Satan, the sensible sight of the light and love of God may for a time be clouded and obscured from them, yet He is still the same, and they shall be sure to be kept by the power of God unto salvation, where they shall enjoy their purchased possession, they being

engraven upon the palm of His hands, and their names having been written in the book of life from all eternity.

17.2. This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father, upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ and union with Him, the oath of God, the abiding of His Spirit, and the seed of God within them, and the nature of the covenant of grace; from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof.

17.3. And though they may, through the temptation of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins, and for a time continue therein, whereby they incur God's displeasure and grieve His Holy Spirit, come to have their graces and comforts impaired, have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded, hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgements upon themselves, yet shall they renew their repentance and be preserved through faith in Christ Jesus to the end.

The shift from “perseverance” to “preservation” in the third article was apparently deliberate, as may be seen in other parts of the Baptist Confession, including:

15.5. Such is the provision which God hath made through Christ in the covenant of grace for the preservation of believers unto salvation, that although there is no sin so small but it deserves damnation, yet there is no sin so great that it shall bring damnation on them that repent, which makes the constant preaching of repentance necessary.

This article is poorly worded, or at least in terms of modern language, because it suggests that repentance, as produced by preaching, is an ongoing *condition* or *means* for deliverance from eternal damnation. I will show in what follows that the English Baptists absolutely did not believe such things. Their meaning here is that sin, whether great or small, surely deserves damnation, but that true repentance from sin does as surely denote forgiveness. Since it is by preaching that such forgiveness becomes clearly known, and by which men are exhorted to repent, preaching is necessary that men may secure peace and assurance. Accordingly, it is doubtful that “damnation” in this article refers to *eternal* damnation, but to *temporal condemnation*, especially in the conscience. To whatever extent this article implies “damnation” to be a possibility for a true believer, it does in fact mean *temporal condemnation*. This is the meaning of the word in Rom 13:2 and 1Cor 11:29 of the King James Bible. The Confession was written in the same century as this Bible and uses much the same language. Article 17.3 affirms that children of God can “bring temporal judgements upon themselves;” hence, the Confession acknowledges a sense in which children of God can experience temporal condemnation. In places where the Confession clearly applies “damnation” to hell, it precedes the word with “eternal” or “everlasting.” The above article makes preaching a means to “preservation” from such *temporal condemnation*, especially the sense of condemnation in the *conscience*.

The important point for present purposes is that the Confession here again applies “preservation” to active and potentially fallible obedience. So the Confession uses “perseverance” to describe the actual security in Christ, and it uses “preservation” with

reference to the temporal state of fellowship with Christ and the *assurance* of being secure in Him. The term is used in the same sense in:

18.4. True believers may have the assurance of their salvation divers ways shaken, diminished, and intermitted; as by negligence in preserving of it, by falling into some special sin which woundeth the conscience and grieveth the Spirit; by some sudden or vehement temptation, by God's withdrawing the light of His countenance, and suffering even such as fear him to walk in darkness and to have no light, yet are they never destitute of the seed of God and life of faith, that love of Christ and the brethren, that sincerity of heart and conscience of duty out of which, by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may in due time be revived, and by the which, in the meantime, they are preserved from utter despair.

Again, it speaks of human negligence in "preserving" the "assurance" of salvation, but in the language of the Confession, men cannot neglect their "perseverance" because it is not dependent on their free will.

Yet further evidence is provided by the Larger Catechism that accompanied the Westminster Confession. The following questions reveal the same tendencies:

79. May not true believers, by reason of their imperfections, and the many temptations and sins they are overtaken with, fall away from the state of grace?

True believers, by reason of the unchangeable love of God, and his decree and covenant to give them perseverance, their inseparable union with Christ, his continual intercession for them, and the Spirit and seed of God abiding in them, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

80. Can true believers be infallibly assured that they are in the estate of grace, and that they shall persevere therein unto salvation?

Such as truly believe in Christ, and endeavor to walk in all good conscience before him, may, without extraordinary revelation, by faith grounded upon the truth of God's promises, and by the Spirit enabling them to discern in themselves those graces to which the promises of life are made, and bearing witness with their spirits that they are the children of God, be infallibly assured that they are in the estate of grace, and shall persevere therein unto salvation.

The first question obviously defined "persevere" to mean what most people today would call "preserve." Then the second question speaks of a believer being "assured" that he will "persevere." This would appear to confuse cause and effect if the terminology of these documents were not understood. Most would think of a believer having to persevere in order to be assured, not the other way around. This use of the term "perseverance" is consistent in all of the documents here considered. This is the only sense in which the term "perseverance" is used except in their reference to prayer where they obviously borrowed the terminology of Eph 6:18.

This pattern in use of these terms is sufficiently consistent to strongly suggest that deliberate intent was involved. A possible theory explaining this policy is: As indicated by the Oxford Dictionary, an ancient meaning of "persevere" was, "to continue, remain, stay in a place, or in a state or condition (implying no active effort)," and its theological meaning is given as, "to

continue in a state of grace.” The doctrine of eternal security was traditionally identified in those days by the term “perseverance.” The Westminster Confession, which is generally thought to be highly calculated in its terminology, apparently chose to respect this tradition even though “preservation” would have been the better and more scriptural term. The Confession then reserved the term “preservation” for references to the habit of active obedience accompanying the state of salvation, but which was potentially fallible and neglected. The consequence of this policy was a near reversal of the definitions we commonly use today.

An important implication of this pattern is a strong suggestion that the writers of these Confessions saw some degree of conditionality in divine commandments to regenerate. The obedience contemplated under preservation was active, potentially fallible and potentially neglected. The Fulton Confession of Primitive Baptists was written at a time when a major issue was the question of conditionality in divine commandments to regenerate. The question was whether the will of a regenerate is to any degree a determinant in his spiritual activity and growth. The majority of Primitive Baptists affirmed that it is. Of course, all agreed that spiritual life itself was owing entirely to unconditional acts of God. The question concerned only the exercise of that life after given. The Fulton brethren saw the London Confession as favoring the view that some conditionality was indeed involved, and they, upon noticing the pattern I have explained, placed a footnote on article 18.4 quoted above. The note stated:

These chapters do clearly set forth that the happiness, assurance, and comforts in this life in some measure, and even in a large measure, are contingent (Confession, Chapter III., Section 1) or made to depend upon the obedience of the children of God and their faithfulness to him. Also that a neglect of duty will bring to the disobedient distress and great grief.

This section demonstrates that modern definitions cannot always be applied to ancient terms. The Westminster and London Confessions switched the modern distinction between “perseverance” and “preservation.” In other historical literature, “perseverance” might have intended both ideas, but with the foremost thought always being what we now call “preservation.” For example, in his chapter on perseverance in Body of Divinity, John Gill defined it as follows:

The doctrine of the saints’ final perseverance in grace to glory is next to be considered; which is, that those who are truly regenerated, effectually called, and really converted, and internally sanctified by the Spirit and grace of God, shall persevere in grace to the end, and shall be everlastingly saved; or shall never finally and totally fall, so as to perish everlastingly.

Though the remainder of his chapter will show that he used the term to imply something about the habit of thought and action as well as the eternal status before God, the above definition referred only to the latter. The same tendency can be seen in old Primitive Baptist writings. The doctrine of perseverance was to them essentially what the doctrine of preservation is today.

Erroneous Concepts of Perseverance

Balanced-Book Perseverance

By “balanced-book” perseverance I mean the idea that for every sin committed by a child of God, there shall be some commensurate, offsetting repentance. This absurd notion has probably resulted from a misinterpretation of article 17.3 of the London Confession. The Baptists added a single clause to the end of the Westminster statement to arrive at this article. The clause was really redundant and has fallen easy prey to misinterpretation. After stating that regenerates may have lapses in faith and obedience for a time, the clause added, “yet shall they renew their repentance and be preserved through faith in Christ Jesus to the end.” When “preservation” is interpreted in the modern sense, the clause seems to say that perpetuation of eternal salvation is somehow conditioned on repentance for the prior sin. This leads to the conclusion that for every sin, whether great or small, there must be an act of repentance sufficient to balance against it. Hence, the “books” must balance in this sense. This errant interpretation largely derives from misunderstanding the sense in which the Confession used “preserved.” The word there describes the temporal *fellowship* with God, not the eternal *relationship* with God. The article does not intend the idea that there is a practical or logical sense in which perpetuation of eternal salvation is at stake in the act of repentance. This will become apparent in the next section when I quote several English Baptists on this issue.

Balanced-book perseverance is so absurd that I cannot imagine it as being intended by the Confession. If consistently applied, it would lead to the conclusion that suicide is a sure mark of damnation, and, as a matter of fact, there have been people who have entertained such worries. Suicide is surely sinful in most cases (though not when to save the lives of others), and it is sin for which there is typically no repentance in this life, but it is absurd to suppose that the death of Christ is insufficient to atone for it. Balanced-book perseverance would also imply that an elect could never physically die during a lapse of faith, such as experienced by Peter, Thomas and Mark. The scriptures say nothing about such strange ideas. The Confession surely did not intend them. It only intended to make a general characterization of the lives of the elect.

Instrumental Perseverance

The next erroneous idea about perseverance is what I shall call “instrumental” perseverance. This is the theory that perseverance in obedience and in repentance for disobedience are divinely-fulfilled *conditions* or *means* or *instruments* to eternal salvation. This idea generally accompanies balanced-book perseverance and is the motivation for it. Instrumental perseverance is an extremely errant concept that turns eternal salvation into a puppeteered works system.

It seems this idea is also partly inspired by a misconstruction of the clause, “yet shall they renew their repentance and be preserved through faith in Christ Jesus to the end.” The clause is taken as an absolute law, and “preserved” is taken in the modern sense of being preserved from eternal damnation. However, the clause is only a general characterization, and as already shown, “preserved” refers to the temporal state of the child of God. Apparently, the instrumental idea is also inferred from article 15.5 quoted above. This conclusion follows from taking the article to imply some logical sense in which believers temporarily lapse into a state of eternal damnation.

As already shown, it does not intend this. Quotes provided below demonstrate that the English Baptists flatly rejected such ideas. Believers can only experience temporal condemnation or condemnation in the conscience. A similar error is committed on article:

15.2. Whereas there is none that doth good and sinneth not, and the best of men may, through the power and deceitfulness of their corruption dwelling in them, with the prevalency of temptation, fall in to great sins and provocations; God hath, in the covenant of grace, mercifully provided that believers so sinning and falling be renewed through repentance unto salvation.

Their error here comes from interpreting “salvation” to mean deliverance from eternal damnation, whereas it means the *assurance* of such, and refers also to temporal fellowship with God and practical deliverance from sin. The “salvation” considered here is what Primitive Baptists sometimes call “time salvation.” The Confession implies the same concept, because it elsewhere denies unequivocally that a regenerate can fall, either temporarily or permanently, from a state of being *eternally* saved. Yet it speaks here of being “renewed” to “salvation” as though it had been temporarily lost, so by “salvation” it necessarily means the *temporal realization* of an eternally saved state.

The other writings of English Baptists clearly show they did not believe in any concept of instrumental perseverance. As already shown in my section on justification, they oftentimes did not even believe in the reformed concept of instrumental faith, much less would they have believed in instrumental obedience or repentance. They were very clear that faith, repentance, obedience, and perseverance therein, are confirmations of a saved state, being the temporal realizations of salvation. I will now provide several quotes confirming this.

Samuel Richardson, in a statement already quoted, summarily addressed the issue with:

That faith or any thing in us is not a *cause, means, or condition*, required to partake of the Covenant of Grace, justification or salvation, but only *fruits and effects* of the Covenant. – (“Justification by Christ Alone,” 1647)

Edward Drapes offered these comments on Heb 2:3 (“*How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation...*”) where he replied to Arminians who commonly use the text to deny eternal security:

But may some say, If Christ died for them, they shall be saved (as you say) and if so, what need the Apostle mind them not to neglect it? For if it be for them you say they shall have it. Therefore his exhortation is vain.

To which I answer, that although the Saints’ eternal happiness depends on the Father’s purpose for their salvation, yet the true ground of visible administrations is from the visible profession of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For with the heart man believeth, but with the mouth he confesseth to salvation. The Apostle judging according to their profession thus speaks. For though a man cannot fall from the Father’s love, yet he may from his profession, which, when he doth, ‘tis (though not an infallible) yet a sad symptom. He is in a sad condition, nigh to burning, having neither part, nor lot in the thing professed, as saith the Apostle. Now because some did profess to be bought by Christ, to have received the Lord Jesus, to be sanctified by the blood of the covenant, and yet by their works denied Him, Whom they said, and Saints so judged (judging by their former profession) [,] had bought them and sanctified them [,] and [they] made shipwreck of

faith and a good conscience, that is to say, the profession of them. The Apostle not knowing by revelation who should stand, nor having any rule to judge [that] men should attain to the glory of the end, without continuing to the end, knowing likewise that the Father hath as well ordained the means to attain the end as well as the end itself, thus speaks; therefore, saith the Apostle, We are persuaded better things of you and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak and desire you to continue to the end (Heb. 6:9).

Drapes explained that outward profession is part of the “visible administrations” of salvation, so it is the means to confirmation of a saved state in the eyes of men, and is the sole criterion by which men can judge, though he said it is a potentially fallible criterion. When Paul said there could be no escape for those who neglected their salvation, Drapes denied he meant eternal salvation was in any sense placed at jeopardy by such neglect, but this is how it would appear from the limited perspective of men. He explained that men, in absence of special revelation from God, cannot conclude that anyone shall attain a glorified end without observing them in continuance toward that end, and though the end, being ordained by God, shall surely come to pass irrespective of the actions of men, yet God has also ordained the means by which men can be assured of this end, and these include preaching and exhortation, and that Paul, understanding this to be the case, exhorted the Jews to steadfastness. This is a reasonable interpretation, but when the text says “*how shall we escape*” the word “we” is possibly referring to the Jewish people collectively. The past experience of that nation plainly showed that rejection of the Law had severe consequences, so their rejection of Christ could be reasonably expected to have even worse. Regardless of what is the proper interpretation, it is apparent that Drapes’ view can hardly be reconciled with the notion that perseverance is instrumental to salvation. His position is further clarified with:

As concerning the other Scriptures that say, Confess your sins one to another, and If we confess our sins, He is faithful to forgive us. If you consider what I have said before, it might be sufficient. These expressions only speak of a forgiveness and acquittal in a man’s conscience. So though a soul may be in some doubt, these are an encouragement for him not to hide his face and run away in fear, but boldly to acknowledge them upon the head of the Scapegoat, the Lord Jesus and God is just and faithful to forgive them, that is to say, to manifest the forgiveness of them to thee, for sin is either chargeable before God, or in the conscience. Before God it is not; therefore, in conscience only and as it is chargeable, such is the forgiveness. It many times fares with a saint, as with a man arrested with a bond formerly canceled. The man hereupon is filled with fear, beginning to call in question whether his surety hath canceled it or no, and so calls upon his surety for the producing his bond that he may be assured he is freed from it by the Law, though unjustly vexed with it. Even so, I say, fares it many times with a saint. Jesus Christ hath told him, The law is satisfied, his debt paid, the bond canceled. The devil assails him, sets his sins, his debts in order before his eyes and charges the law upon him whereby the soul begins to fear again and is ready to question whether Christ hath told him so as he did before believe [,] and now he cries out for his pardon that the bond may be taken out of his way that he may be set at liberty through the manifestation of Christ’s love. Yea, I say further, a man that hath obtained a pardon from his Prince may be attached for the same offense and now may desire, in confidence that his surety, in whose hands the pardon is, to give it him that so he may be set at liberty. Let me tell you, Satan many times assaults the soul and troubles it and then many a soul in faith asks his [i.e. Christ’s] pardon, or the benefit of his pardon that so he may be freed from Satan’s buffetings and thus in the Scriptures it is frequent to ask the thing producing a benefit for the effects sake, as for instance, we may desire to eat the flesh of Christ when we mean the benefit that redounds to us from it, so that the sum and substance of what I have said is,

First, That sin is fully satisfied for by Christ's death in the sight of God and shall never be charged upon a saint which pardon is in the hands of Christ for him.
 Secondly, That sin lieth in the conscience till believing and when the soul believes, is forgiveness given to him, that is to say, published, made manifest and declared.
 Thirdly, That though he may be freed, yet be in trouble or fear again (for according to the measure of his faith, such is his assurance and consolation) & then he may pray for the pardon of sin, that is to say, the fuller assurance of it and may ask for pardon of sin, as it includes his right to be freed from trouble or wrath for them anymore. So that I say, all sins are pardoned in the sense I have already declared, past, present and to come. – (Gospel Glory, 1648)

Drapes is clear that confession is not a means or instrument of salvation, and this necessarily implies that repentance is neither. Drapes claimed these things have bearing on the conscience of a man, not on his eternal standing before God. I will add that confession and repentance not only have these subjective benefits but can also objectively deliver from temporal chastisements and the natural consequences of sin.

Benjamin Cox commented on Prov 1:23 – “*Turn you at my reproof, behold I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you.*” Cox opposed the idea that such repentance could be performed by an unregenerate man to accomplish his salvation. In connection with this, Cox said:

The latter part of this verse contains a promise. You (as it seems) conceive the promise to be here made only unto those who obey the exhortation afore going. Be it so. Only remember then, that they which obey the exhortation, do obey the same through God's special grace, and that the promise serves to assure them of the continuance and increase of grace. – (“Some Mistaken Scriptures Sincerely Explained,” 1646)

Cox explained that the repentance considered in the text could be achieved only through grace, and he did not make it a means or instrument of eternal salvation; rather, he said it “serves to assure them of the continuance and increase of grace.”

John Gill, in his commentary on Acts 2:38 (“...*repent and be baptized for the remission of sins...*”), said:

...not that forgiveness of sin could be procured either by repentance, or by baptism; for this is only obtained by the blood of Christ; but the apostle advises these awakened, sensible, repenting, and believing souls, to submit to baptism, that by it their faith might be led to Christ, who suffered and died for their sins, who left them buried in his grave, and who rose again for their justification from them; all which is, in a most lively manner, represented in the ordinance of baptism by immersion...

Gill's position on repentance is further elucidated by his comments on Acts 11:18 (“...*Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*”):

...for it is not by repentance that men live spiritually, but by faith in Christ Jesus; nor do they obtain eternal life by it, but by Christ; though true repentance is an evidence of spiritual life, and it begins with it, for as soon as ever God quickens a sinner, he shows him the evil of sin, and gives him repentance for it...

Observe that Gill said repentance is an “evidence” of spiritual life, not a divinely fulfilled means thereto. Gill’s best statement on the subject is in his comments on 2Cor 7:10 (“*For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation...*”):

...and this repentance is unto salvation; not the cause or author of it, for that is Christ alone; nor the condition of it, but is itself a blessing of salvation, a part of it, the initial part of it, by which, and faith we enter upon the possession of salvation; it is an evidence of interest in it, and issues in the full enjoyment of it...

Hence, Gill saw repentance as *being* salvation, or as being a *temporal realization* of salvation, but *not* as a *means* to salvation.

The unifying principle in these English Baptist quotes is that they were averse to the idea that any action of man, howsoever fulfilled, served as a means, cause, condition or instrument to his own salvation. Humans, they said, only act out their eternal salvation. Faith, repentance, obedience, etc. are conditions only in the sense that they are terms upon which a man may *know* his salvation. A temporal realization or manifestation of salvation is not to be confused with a condition or instrument to salvation. These are also the sentiments of Primitive Baptists.

While the scriptures speak of “*repentance unto life*” in Acts 11:18, this must not be confused with repentance *in* life, or the day-to-day repentance of one who is born again. The word “repent” means “to turn” or “to change” and “*repentance unto life*” refers to the change occurring in regeneration, but the phrase does not refer to changes occurring after spiritual life has been given. Accordingly, 2Cor 7:10 speaks of “*repentance unto salvation*,” but this refers to repentance experienced only by those who are *already* quickened and justified, as may be seen from the context. The “salvation” produced by such repentance is neither regeneration nor justification, nor is it their preservation; rather, it is restoration to assurance of salvation by proper fellowship with God.

Perseverance is a condition of salvation only in the sense of *manifesting* it. Similarly, a bank statement confirms that a man has possession of a certain sum of money, but the statement itself did nothing to fulfill any condition leading to the possession of this money. To the contrary, it was the satisfaction of these conditions which led to the bank statement.

Legalistic Perseverance

Another errant form of perseverance is what I shall call “legalistic perseverance.” This type of perseverance contrives a law or standard of obedience and insists that all elect will meet it. Those not meeting the contrived standard are judged to be nonelect. It does not take long to destroy this concept of perseverance using scriptural examples.

Few would have considered Lot to be child of God based on what the Old Testament says about him, yet 2Pet 2:8 reveals otherwise. The same may be said of Samson (Heb 11:32). Solomon also had characteristics expected of unregenerates. The same may be said of the children of Israel who fell in the wilderness. It does not seem likely that all of these were reprobates. The Bible says they crossed the Red Sea by faith (Heb 11:29). They were all baptized unto Moses,

and were said to drink of the Spiritual Rock, which was a representation of Christ (1Cor 10:1-4). They were also characterized as the “church” in the wilderness (Acts 7:38). These examples all contradict the claims of those advocating legalistic perseverance.

New Testament examples include Demas, of whom John Gill said,

Demas is sometimes mentioned as an instance of apostasy; who, very probably, was a good man, since he is mentioned with such who were so (Col. 4:14; Philem. 1:24), and what the apostle says of him, that he had *forsaken him, having loved this present world*, is not sufficient to prove him an apostate, any more than Mark’s departure from the apostle Paul, and others at Pamphylia; for his too much love of the world, which is to be observed in many, otherwise good and valuable men, would prove them to be so. – (Body of Divinity, ch 15, p 577)

Another striking example is the Corinthians who were stricken with sickness and death because of their impieties during communion. Paul said of them, “*For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep,*” (1Cor 11:30). Concerning this verse, Gill said in his commentary:

...*and many sleep*; that is, die a corporeal death, which is often in Scripture signified by sleep, and frequently used of the saints, and their death, and may intend and include some of them here; for though the Lord might resent so far their unworthy conduct and behaviour at his table, as to remove them out of this world by death, yet their souls may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

These cases are sufficient to show that most forms of legalistic perseverance cannot be true. However, the Bible does not intend these cases to suggest that the extreme behavior of Lot, Samson, Demas, etc. is commonplace with God’s children, nor does the Bible intend this in the numerous places where it reports children of God as falling into grievous sin, such as David in adultery, or Moses in murder or Solomon in idolatry. The Bible purposefully describes children of God as involved in all manner of sin to accentuate the fact that men are not saved by any imagined goodness of their own, or because of their abstinence from any particular evil. It shows salvation to be of grace alone, and this grace is sufficient to cover the greatest of sins. This will prompt adoration to God and grateful service from His regenerate children, but wicked men will turn it into lasciviousness (Jude 4). These cases are also intended to inspire hope, not only for ourselves but for others we love. Almost every Christian has family and friends for whom they entertain hope, even though evidence may be lacking to encourage it. Hope can be a very powerful and moving force. For example, a young man in love with a beautiful but indifferent woman will scarcely surrender his pursuit of her as long as any hope remains. Accordingly, Christian hope for others, when properly directed, is a great inspiration to pray for them and to labor for their dedication to Lord.

While too much can be made of cases such as Lot, Samson, Demas, etc, too little can be made of them also. Some teaching legalistic perseverance would hesitate to even mention these cases for fear that someone might use them as occasion for license or indolence. They apparently think their legalistic form of perseverance is necessary to avert such behavior. Ministers who reason this way are playing the role of psychologist instead of being faithful to the word. Also, their psychological analysis is as faulty as their motivation. The most infamous cases of wickedness and hypocrisy in professed Christianity have occurred among those who taught that saved

individuals can actually forfeit their salvation and burn in hell for their sins. This behavior would not be predicted by intuitive psychology. Such miscalculations should be sufficient to warn anyone that speculations about the psychological effects of doctrines are very precarious. The human mind is the most complex object of the natural creation, and when it is supplemented with a spiritual nature, it becomes all the more difficult to evaluate. No man fully understands it, and it is a dubious practice to assess any doctrine merely on the basis of what we think its psychological effects will be. We can be sure that the truth of God will have a favorable psychological effect on all of His children, and the more fully and accurately it is taught, the more favorable it will be. Anything that is not the truth of God, or which falls short of fully or accurately teaching it, will have an unfavorable psychological effect, and this will be the case regardless of what is suggested by our own analysis or intuition. As Samuel Richardson said, "...none shall stumble and hurt themselves by this truth, but such as shall perish, and it's no matter for them. The children must have bread though dogs may snatch it."

There is also inconsistency in the idea that failure to teach legalistic perseverance will lead to licentiousness. If God has indeed predetermined that all elect will persevere in this sense, then it follows that man can do nothing to hinder it. Hence, the charge that failure to teach such perseverance will prevent perseverance is really in itself a denial of perseverance. If legalistic perseverance were true, then the most damage any man could do is facilitate the corruption of the nonelect or fail to give them adequate warning. This would be no minor error, but I think conscience will testify that much more is actually at stake. Corrupt and irresponsible teaching has adverse consequences even upon the elect, and this undeniable fact should be sufficient to show that perseverance cannot be understood in a legalistic sense.

A problem for legalistic perseverance is that the Bible will afford it no help when it seeks to specify this supposed standard of faith and obedience that all elect are imagined to attain. The scriptures never set any standard of obedience other than that of Christ Himself. The New Testament is the consummate ideology. Its salvation is the consummate bliss. Its standard of righteousness is the perfect norm, being defined by the example and teachings of Jesus Christ. It is a standard of absolute perfection. Because no person ever attains this mark, one is naturally led to ask: What is the minimal mark that saved persons should be expected to attain? The Bible does not define such a standard, because men would then look to it, and find satisfaction upon attaining it, whereas they are commanded to ever look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of their faith (Heb 12:2). It would therefore be totally out of character for the Bible to set up any inferior standard this way.

The carnal mind will find no comfort in the fact that the Bible never endorses any definitive standard of obedience beneath that of Christ Himself. It is therefore the tendency of the carnal mind to contrive its own standard. This will invariably be an attainable mark, always being defined so as to excuse personal weaknesses, but to exclude those who are held in contempt, and will nearly always be influenced to some degree or another by current social norms. This is where a valid concept of perseverance can be easily corrupted into legalistic perseverance. If it be taught so as to imply that all elect will at least achieve some particular threshold of faith and obedience, then because the Bible purposefully refuses to define this mark, carnal men will undertake to define it for themselves. They will then find a false sense of security in attaining their own rule of righteousness, and will feel licensed to view with contempt those who do not,

yet these perceived offenders will have their own contrived standards, perhaps having more rigor on some points than the former. An unfortunate aspect of these manmade standards is that they will outwardly appear righteous unto men, when in fact they are merely whited sepulchres, being the products of human depravity.

The man who never partakes alcohol will boast that he never drinks, but the man who drinks will boast that he never drinks to excess, but the man who drinks to excess will boast that he never drives while drinking. Each man writes his own law to his own convenience then boasts of his compliance. Each man will also delight in the fact that other men fall short of his mark – a mark that was well-calculated to enable the saying, “*God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are.*” The same thing happens to religious service. Men devise their own standards, and these will dictate that with so much church attendance, so many Hail Marys, so many tithes, etc, a man may find satisfaction in his own devotion, then behold it with pride, and count others with contempt. Solomon called this the “*sacrifice of fools*” and rejected it as evil (Eccl 5:1). The Bible casts all these manmade standards aside, then puts Jesus Christ in their place, and this causes all reasonable men to sink in humility. The concept of perseverance can easily fall prey to the corruption I have described.

True assurance is not obtained by looking backward to some self-defined mark we have surpassed; rather, it is obtained by placing our faith in the finished work of Christ, the verity of this faith being measured by our approach to “*the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus,*” (Phil 3:14). Though men may obtain some sense of security in the former, this can be the same confidence wherewith Pharoah presumed to cross the Red Sea. Reliable assurance comes only when “*the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God,*” (Rom 8:16). This the Spirit does in various ways, one being “*if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together,*” (vs 17). The phrase “*with him*” is clearly the key. This text also teaches there is something personal about assurance. Each man is assured personally by the Holy Spirit dwelling in his heart. The terms upon which the Holy Spirit gives this peace to one may not be the same as for another. The Lord said, “*For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required...*” (Lk 12:48). So the Holy Spirit, in granting peace and assurance to the heart, will demand more of that man who has been given more, and less of that man who has been given less.

Perseverance is sometimes perverted to such an extent that assurance becomes the principal object of Christian service. This error in emphasis may be grouped along with other errors in what could be called “egocentric” Christianity. Egocentric Christianity is everywhere in the world today. People attend church to learn how to deal with their adversities, to deal with their personal problems, to feel better about themselves, to facilitate assurance of their salvation, to facilitate a happier marriage for themselves, to facilitate a better home for themselves, etc. Many sermons these days are designed to address such. These things are good and needful, but let a man attend to them ever so diligently, and when all is done, he will still be a worm under the Law of God. It is all meaningless if it is not true that “*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*” This message is the primary theme, and the promotion of the cause representing it should be the principal aim. If a man will understand his need of it, and love it, and the value of the cause representing it, and sacrifice himself for its sake, those things mentioned earlier will

take care of themselves, and I think more effectively than when they become the object of focus. I do not deny that such things need be addressed, but the emphasis should be the Cause of Christ.

Egocentric Christianity is also an uninspired Christianity. Men generally do not have much inspiration in self-improvement when it is merely for the sake of self-improvement. A fat man has not much inspiration in dieting. A smoker concerned for his health only reluctantly refuses a cigarette. A sick man generally loathes his prescribed medicine or exercise. A student who studies with no real zeal for the subject, but only for the sake of self-advancement, must drag himself out of bed to attend class. Egocentric Christianity will do no better. But men have a very different attitude about a cause or ideal. They will spill their blood for this. They will charge into gunfire, cross icy waters, endure hunger, endure hardship, endure persecution, and defy all odds to fight for a larger purpose in which they believe. This will be the case with us if our first love is the Cause of Christ and His Glory. When sacrifice is made for the sake of this, and not merely for the sake of personal improvement or assurance, these personal needs will take care of themselves, and I think in a most powerful way.

I will now consider some scriptures that are sometimes thought to imply a definitive standard of obedience that all elect will achieve, but in fact these scriptures teach nothing but the high standard defined by Jesus Christ:

For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? – 1Jn 5:4,5

Here it will be said that all children of God do in this life overcome the world, and “overcome” must imply some definitive degree of faith and obedience. But “overcome” means exactly what it says. It means to absolutely and completely defeat the oppositions of the world. It is not clear that this text has reference to our works at all. It is perhaps referring to the fact that Christ has overcome the world, and we shall overcome in Him, being assured by faith of our interest in Him and His victory. But even if the text does have reference to the works we perform by His grace, “overcome” must not be changed from its proper meaning, so the text must then be interpreted as defining the ideal *toward* which children of God tend from their spiritual nature, and *toward* which they are carried by grace, and *to* which they will finally be brought in glory. This is the only interpretation that harmonizes with other statements made by John, especially:

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. – 1Jn 3:9-10

Observe he did not say that whosoever is born of God does not “usually” commit sin. His statement was that whosoever is born of God absolutely does not commit sin. It is clear that he is not here speaking in merely legal or positional terms, because he then said, “*In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil...*” The text apparently has something to do with observable behavior. Accordingly, he said: “*If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him,*” (1Jn 2:29). Here the expression “*doeth righteousness*” is defined by the previous expression “*he is righteous,*” which refers to Christ.

Hence, “*doeth righteousness*” does not describe behavior that is “primarily” righteous. Rather, it describes behavior that is defined by the very example of Christ Himself.

All of this was written by the same man who said:

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. – 1Jn 1:8-10

This statement does not contradict the former quotes. The earlier statements must be understood in light of the fact that the New Testament has no standard of righteousness apart from the ideal example of Christ. John would have never said whosoever is born of God “mostly” overcomes the world, nor would he have ever said whosoever is born of God “seldom” commits sin, nor that those who are “generally” righteous are born of Him. Such statements would be out of character with the Bible. In the statements he actually made, John characterized those who are born of God by the ideal state *toward* which they tend, *toward* which they are carried, and *to* which they are finally brought. There is no standard apart from the ideal standard. The New Testament is the consummate ideology.

Other texts that are sometimes abused in the teaching of legalistic perseverance are scriptures promising salvation to the faithful and obedient. The following scripture is typical:

Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. – Mk 13:12,13

Those who believe in the possibility of falling from salvation will interpret this text as saying that perpetuation of a saved state is conditioned upon enduring to martyrdom. On the other hand, some advocates of legalistic perseverance will interpret it as saying that a saved state will always produce endurance unto martyrdom. Neither interpretation is correct. Both err on two points:

First, both interpretations commit the logical fallacy of denying the antecedent. This is probably the most common logical error committed when reading the Bible. Stated abstractly, if one condition implies another, it does not follow that a failure in the first condition implies a failure in the second. To assert that it does is to commit the error called “denying the antecedent.” For example, it follows that men who have the flu are sick, but it does not follow that men not having the flu are not sick. As a second example, rain always implies clouds, but absence of rain does not imply absence of clouds. A classic scriptural example of denying the antecedent occurs with Mark 16:16, which asserts that all who believe and are baptized shall be saved. Many have concluded from this that those who are not baptized cannot be saved. This is a logical fallacy. Accordingly, the above text does not imply that every capitulation in the face of death implies a condemned state. The text simply assures salvation to those who do not capitulate.

Second, both interpretations err in regard to the point made earlier, namely, that the scriptural standard of obedience and endurance is never less than perfection, being defined by Christ Himself. The endurance contemplated by the above text is the perfect endurance of Christ. The

Bible would never endorse anything less. “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps,” (1Pet 2:21). “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised),” (Heb 10:23). “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus,” (Phil 2:5). “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another,” I (1Jn 4:11). “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren,” (1Jn 3:16). Now the perfect endurance of Christ is never attained by any man, but it is the ideal toward which children of God tend and are carried, and to which they are finally brought.

Valid Intents of “Perseverance”

Oftentimes those who defend the term “perseverance” merely intend to uphold the idea that regeneration produces a profound and enduring change in a man. This is surely scriptural. Those bent on denying this will find no support even in the word “preservation,” because this term describes both the legal and vital sides of salvation. The preservation of the vital side means that the regenerate man forever possesses a dominant spiritual nature producing significant effects on his thoughts and behavior.

Any doctrine seeking to deny the significance of spirituality in the regenerate man had just as well deny the significance of depravity in the unregenerate man. The reason is that scriptures asserting one nearly always assert the other with equal emphasis. Such texts include:

Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. – Mt 12:33-35

He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God. – Jn 8:47

But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me... – Jn 10:26-27

For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. – Rom 8:5

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. – 1Cor 1:18

But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. – 1Cor 1:23-24

For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. – 2Cor 2:15-16

We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error. – 1John 4:6

These are some of the strongest scriptures in the Bible asserting depravity, yet they all assert the spirituality of regenerate men in contrast to this depravity. Now the depravity of man is not a nebulous concept to any believer in the doctrines of grace. There are definitive conclusions that can be drawn from it, one being that such a man *will not come to Christ*. Since the spiritual man is of exactly opposite bent, it follows that any man who will not come to Christ is not a spiritual man. Hence, these scriptures forbid the idea that any regenerate man will truly reject Jesus Christ as revealed in truth by the Holy Ghost. While I have defended the idea that God saves even where the preaching is not heard, outright rejection of Christ as revealed in the inspired word is a very different matter. There are of course people who say they are believers when really they are not, and some who say they are unbelievers when really they are not, but if a man claims to be an unbeliever and is true to his claims, that man is *not* born again. The following scriptures powerfully affirm:

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. – Mk 16:16-17

He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. – Jn 3:18

He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him. – Jn 3:36

I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins. – Jn 8:24

But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death. – Rev 21:8

We can add to these facts that scriptures say the faith of a born-again person cannot be totally and finally lost. In this sense the child of God perseveres. Peter said:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. – 1Peter 1:3-7

It is important to note that he says faith may be tried with “*manifold temptations*.” Scripture and experience show these trials can be severe and oppressing, moving children of God to doubt, and possibly to such extremes that they may attempt to cast their faith aside. Any concept of perseverance denying this is manifestly wrong. But the underlying spiritual nature perseveres notwithstanding, because it is preserved by God, and this will mean that a born-again man cannot

truly join ranks with unregenerates. He is of a fundamentally different character. Children of God are defeated in unbelief. Wicked men triumph in it. Children of God want to believe even when they do not. Wicked men do not want to believe even when they do (Isa 26:10-11, Js 2:19). Children of God have a basic need, desire and disposition to believe the truth of God. Unregenerates will seek refuge in lies. They will hate the truth even when constrained to believe it. Concerning one class of men Jesus said, *"To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice,"* (John 18:37). Concerning the other class He said, *"I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive,"* (Jn 5:43).

This radical difference of heart can occur in men who outwardly appear much the same. Though Lot lived in the wicked environment of Sodom, and fellowshiped it more than he should, he could never truly reconcile his mind to it. *"For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds,"* (2Pet 2:8). Samson lived a wayward life, but his spiritual character was revealed when he called upon the Lord in his death (Jdg 16:28). John said no murderer has eternal life in him (1Jn 3:16), and while David committed murder, he was not a murderer in the sense of this text. He murdered in action but was not a murderer in character. For this reason, he suffered all his life for his sin. Other men murder only to further their lust for it. The Prodigal Son indulged in sin, but his nature forbade him to prosper in it. The husks that were well-suited for swine could not satisfy his needs (Lk 15:16). Accordingly, the wicked may fatten themselves on sin, but it will cause nausea in the stomachs of regenerates. All of God's children are placed at conflict with sin when they are born again (Rom 7:14-25, Gal 5:17), and they will always be at conflict with sin, sometimes winning and sometimes losing, but never finding peace in it because their spiritual nature will not allow it. Now all these examples show that a regenerate person perseveres in what he *is* even when not in what he *does*. His heart is not the same as other men.

The consequences of the spiritual nature can be understood by comparison and contrast with the carnal nature. A natural man can choose not to eat, drink and breathe, but he cannot change the fact that God has written the necessity of these things into the constitution of his natural being. He therefore harms himself when acting contrary to his nature. Accordingly, a regenerate person can sin, but he cannot change the fact that God has written into his spiritual being a basic need to believe, repent and obey. He harms himself when acting against the grain of his spiritual nature.

In addition to how his spiritual nature disposes him, the regenerate man will also be guided by the active management of God. The pervasiveness of this can be seen in:

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. – 1Cor 10:13

So the supervision of God over his life is no less prevalent than the temptations he encounters. When he acts in disregard to this supervision and rebels in sin, then scriptures say God will deal with him using fatherly chastisements:

And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord

loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. – Heb 12:5-10

Indeed, the Holy Spirit is a guide and teacher in all aspects of spirituality. This begins in the new birth and remains an ongoing process thereafter. John expressed this with:

But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him. And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming. – 1Jn 2:27-28

When a child of God is born again, he has more than a mere spiritual capacity. He is not merely liberated from bondage to his carnal nature to a state of indifference between his two natures. Rather, he has a strong disposition to the Spirit. *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new,”* (2Cor 5:17). Paul also said, *“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God,”* (1Cor 1:18). He did not say the preaching of the cross “can be” the power of God to them that are saved. He said it is such. A few verses later, he claimed the preaching of the cross is both the power of God and the wisdom of God to them that are called (vs 24). These and all other scriptures quoted in this section plainly show that the new birth produces a radical, consequential change in those who experience it.

Faith, repentance and obedience are marks by which a child of God is known, and endurance in these things is an important criterion by which they are proven to be genuine. Some of the most condemning language in the Bible is directed against those who made a pretense of these things but then abandoned Christ and returned to the world. The following scriptures are examples:

For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. – 2Pet 2:21-22

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. – 1Jn 2:19

These scriptures indicate there is no stronger mark of a damned state than to desert Christ and His truth after having been instructed in it. Peter said such persons would have been better off had they never been taught at all. This implies that the degree of culpability and incrimination in defection is commensurate to the truth that has been taught. *“For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more,”* (Lk 12:48). The defectors described by Peter and John had been taught in

apostolic purity, had witnessed the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, had known the witnesses of the resurrection, and had possibly been exposed to the earthly ministry of Christ Himself. These factors made their conduct especially symptomatic of unregeneracy.

If it is not true that children of God have an enduring nature to believe, repent and obey, then how could anyone have assurance of being a child of God on the basis of these things? If it is not true that hypocrites have a nature to apostatize from outward profession, then how can those who have kept the faith be at all sure they are not hypocrites? Stated more generally, if the possession of the Spirit does not powerfully distinguish one from the world, then how can one who is distinguished from the world know that his distinction is owing to the Spirit? If it is not owing to the Spirit, then it is worthless for assurance because “...*if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*,” (Rom 8:9). An outright denial of any form of perseverance might offer hope to the unbelieving and apathetic, but it would come at the expense of diminishing hope for those who believe and love. Such claims are opposed by scripture, reason and conscience. So while “preservation” is the better term to express our security in salvation, the term should not be used to the exclusion of what scriptures have repeatedly and plainly said about the fundamentally different character that born-again children of God have from others.

Yet, because of our inability to truly know the hearts of others, we should be very cautious in drawing judgments about them. The intent of scripture is not to qualify us as perfect judges regarding the salvation of specific individuals. Those in the habit of rendering such judgments will invariably be favorably skewed toward those they personally like, and unfavorably skewed against those they dislike. The issue has nothing to do with who we *want* to be saved, so our tendency to such prejudice should caution us all the more. It is important that we heed what we have scriptural *authority to say*, and to say neither more nor less. We have authority to say that true believers in Christ are saved. We have authority to say those who reject Christ are not. For multitudes of people, we will not be able to confidently classify them one way or the other. For these it is best to say nothing.

Scriptural Defense of Preservation

It is unfortunately the case that the majority of Christians believe that a born-again person can relapse into a state of hell-bound condemnation. Indeed, most of these Christians believe it possible for a person to go through several cycles in and out of salvation. Calvinism adamantly denies this, claiming that eternal life is literally and absolutely *eternal*. Differences among Christians over this doctrine have led to as many debates as any other aspect of Calvinism, yet no other tenet of that doctrine has stronger footing.

One reason for the attention received by this issue is that nearly all Baptists have retained a belief in preservation from bygone days when their doctrine was Calvinistic. Though modern Baptists have disavowed most other aspects of Calvinism, preservation remains a principal feature of nearly all Baptist beliefs. This causes modern Baptist doctrine to be an interesting combination of ideas. On one hand, it contends that salvation is contingent on the choice of the sinner, yet having made the saving choice, the sinner cannot choose to revert back to his former state. This is an unexpected conclusion. If a man got saved by means of his own choice, then reason dictates that he could become unsaved by the same. A similar inconsistency is found in the fact

that most modern Baptists are very opposed to the Calvinistic idea that salvation is the unconditional gift of God, yet they themselves affirm that God unconditionally maintains it. This is yet again an unexpected conclusion. If it is right for God to unconditionally maintain salvation, then how could it be wrong for Him to unconditionally give it? Conversely, if it is wrong for Him to unconditionally give it, then how could it be right for Him to unconditionally maintain it? The reason for these inconsistencies is that modern Baptist doctrine commingles its Calvinistic past with new Arminian modifications. The result is an incompatible mix.

The common Arminian accusation against preservation is that it tends to license. It alleges the doctrine implies that a man once saved can thereafter live a life of rebellion with almost complete impunity. This objection is simplistic and somewhat hypocritical. A similar accusation could as easily be made against Arminianism. Its advocates typically teach that regardless of how rebellious a man has lived, or regardless of how many times he has cycled in and out of salvation, he can in the end repent of his rebellion and secure to himself a heavenly destiny. So he can get to heaven by faithful perseverance in obedience, but also by playing “catch up” provided he is willing to take his chances with a sudden, unanticipated death. Stated differently, heaven can be attained either by good living or simply by good timing. Calvinism is at least consistent. It says no man will get to heaven but by the grace of God.

The accusation that preservation tends to license is an argument that begs the question in that it judges the doctrine under assumptions that only Arminians tend to make. Under its typical view, salvation tends to be mostly a legal matter. It contends that an unsaved man is like a saved man in that he is capable of spiritual decisions, conduct and commitments. So the basic nature of the saved man is no different than what it was before. He is the same man but making different decisions. By means of these decisions, he attains an absolved legal status before God, upon which he is written into the Lamb’s Book of Life, though he may thereafter fall from it if his decisions take a turn for the worse.

The scriptural view significantly differs. It says salvation is not merely a change of legal status but also entails a radical change in the nature of the man himself. These two aspects of salvation are commonly described by the terms “legal” and “vital.” In scripture, the legal aspect commonly falls under the term “justification” whereas the vital is described by “born again” and synonymous terms. The necessity of both can be seen in a simple example: Consider what would be needful to conscionably set a guilty prisoner free. First, the demands of the law against him for his crime must be satisfied. Second, his wicked nature must be changed to ensure he does not replicate the crime upon being freed. Now Arminianism typically gives due emphasis to the legal side of this transaction, but the vital aspect it tends to neglect or ignore, and this is largely what occasions its criticism of the doctrine of preservation.

If salvation involved no fundamental change in the man, but were only a matter of legal status, then the doctrine of preservation would indeed allow that a man once saved could return altogether to his unsaved ways of infidelity and sin. But when evaluated in its proper context, this accusation becomes contradictory within itself. It would imply that the man had been changed without being changed; moved without being moved, and saved without being saved. A saved man has been changed by a newly given spiritual nature that is disposed to Christ and

disposed against sin. Preservation refers not only to his absolved legal status, but also to the divine maintenance and perpetuation of his new spiritual life.

This of course does not render him sinless. He retains his former carnal nature, but his carnality then becomes a burden and vexation to him. He is a sinner, but not all sinners are the same. One man may march with the enemy in traitorous collaboration. Another man may march with the enemy because he has shackles on his feet, cuffs on his hands and a gun to his back. The two cases are similar in some respects, but diametrically opposite in others. The unsaved man happily rolls with the flow of the sinful world (Eph 2:1-3). The saved man is in a perpetual struggle against it (Rom 7:14-25, Gal 5:17). He may at times be winning the struggle and at other times be losing it, but the struggle always remains. He can choose to act contrary to his dominant spiritual nature, but never without adverse consequence to himself.

These claims will be corroborated by the experiences of the Christian reader. Most believers have experienced times of satanic attack where they were so doubtful and discouraged that they considered casting their faith aside and becoming as infidels. Yet they found a radical difference between themselves and true unbelievers. Infidels triumph in their unbelief, and seem elated with any discovery they think to disprove God and the Bible. But God's children are defeated in unbelief, and find their periods of doubt to be the lowest valleys of life. Infidels and devils do not want to believe even when they do (Js 2:19). God's children want to believe even when they do not (Mk 9:24). This is not something they chose for themselves. It is the consequence of what God has made them. Their salvation gives them an inherent need, desire and disposition to believe on Jesus Christ and to obey Him. The shame felt for their diversions into doubt is a powerful testimony from the conscience that it is their duty and ability to trust in the Lord, but this ability is not a product of nature. It is the result of special divine grace.

The insufficient emphasis placed by Arminianism on the vital aspect of salvation is a natural consequence of the fact that such systems commonly promote the idea of salvation by ritual. The ritual may be baptism, praying the sinner's prayer, responding to the altar call or doing something else, but ritual will somewhere play a crucial role in the saving formula. Oftentimes, the select ritual will have little resemblance to anything in the Bible, and even if it imitates scriptural practice, it will be done without scriptural motivations. It is a remarkable thing that huge numbers of Christians believe that heaven and hell swing on baptism, yet they see no necessity in following the scriptural pattern of baptism by immersion applied to professing believers. Religious rituals are thought to have such saving power that even self-concocted ones like infant baptism and sprinkling are considered worthy of our confidence.

While one can easily indulge in the illusion that heaven can be secured by such rituals, it is not so easy to pretend they bring about a real and enduring change in the nature of the subject. Such ideas are opposed by scripture, reason and the plain facts of experience. Multiplied millions have submitted to these rituals with no apparent change of heart. There are two solutions to this dilemma: The first is to dismiss the importance of a change in nature, even to the point of denying any need of it. This is the solution of Arminianism. The second solution is the scriptural and logical approach: It is to affirm that a change of nature can only be effected by a supernatural power; that a man changes because he is changed by such power, and that his obedience to *scriptural* ritual and other practice is confirmation of this fact, not the cause of it.

The scriptural basis for preservation is formidable. Proofs include:

1) Our life in Christ is repeatedly described in the Bible as being *everlasting* and *eternal* (Jn 3:16, 3:36, 4:14, 4:36, 5:24, 6:47, 6:54, 10:28, 17:2, Acts 13:48, Rom 5:21, 6:23, 2Thes 2:16, Heb 5:9, 9:12, 1Jn 5:11-13). Notwithstanding this, Arminianism says this life is more fragile and transitory than the natural life it purports to save.

Objectors defend themselves in this dubious claim by saying that saved individuals only have eternal life *in prospect*. However, closer examination of the scriptures referenced in the prior paragraph will plainly show they intend more than this. Numerous of them present the life under consideration as being a currently-held possession. Obviously, a glorified state is in prospect, but title to it is presently owned by the believer, who also is an ongoing participant in its benefits. As Jesus told the Samaritan woman, “*But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life,*” (Jn 4:14). This well of life is obviously a *present* possession. It is not merely in prospect. The well is also perpetual; otherwise, it would be no better than the common wells from which we drink only to thirst again.

Viewing from the opposite angle, John said, “*No murderer hath eternal life abiding in him,*” (1Jn 3:15), which would be a senseless statement if children of God were void of the same, only differing from the murderer by what they had in prospect. Nor could one make any sense of the numerous other scriptures describing unsaved individuals as being in a state of death (Mt 8:22, Jn 5:25, Rom 7:6, Eph 2:1-5, Col 2:13, 1Tim 5:6, 1Jn 3:14, Jude 12). No reasonable interpretation could conclude the death being considered is merely in prospect. God told Adam, “*...in the **day** that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,*” (Gn 2:17). To deny this is to replicate the original sin, and to choose the word of the Devil over the word of God. If unsaved man is presently dead, then saved man is presently alive. This life is eternal. “*He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, **hath** everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life,*” (Jn 5:24).

2) The fact that a saved person can never be lost is expressly stated in numerous scriptures, including: “*All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out... And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day,*” (Jn 6:37-39). This verse establishes preservation in multiple ways: It says all given by the Father to Christ will come to Him. Any theory entertaining ideas they will not is unscriptural in its assumptions and therefore unscriptural in its conclusions. It says they will not be cast out under any condition whatsoever. Further, it says it is the objective of both the Father and Christ that none be lost. If God were to fail in this objective, how could we be sure He will succeed in any other? Denial of preservation puts the salvation of every man in jeopardy. Scriptures plainly assert that God can and will save His sheep: “*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand,*” (Jn 10:27-30). To deny this is to make the blood and flesh of Christ of no greater benefit to the spiritual man than common bread is to the natural man. As Christ said,

“Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead... I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever...” (Jn 6:49-52).

3) The scriptures also state that no charge can be brought against a saved person. Since they cannot be condemned, neither can they be eternally damned: *“For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified,”* (Heb 10:14). *“Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth,”* (Rom 8:33). *“He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life,”* (Jn 5:24).

4) The Lord's elect are said to be *predestined* to salvation. It is impossible to reconcile this concept without preservation. Any attempt to do so will essentially entail stripping “predestinated” of all reasonable meaning, and therefore eliminating all meaning from: *“Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will... In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will,”* (Eph 1:5-11). *“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified,”* (Rom 8:29-30).

5) The fundamental cause of salvation is the eternal life and love of Christ. The effect cannot be removed so long as the cause remains of force. Christ said, *“Because I live, ye shall live also,”* (Jn 14:19). His eternal life and love are the necessary and sufficient basis for sustenance of our own spiritual lives. Eternal life ceases only if He ceases to live or love. The scriptures tell us He is *“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever,”* (Heb 13:8). Two thousand years ago, He was one willing to condescend, suffer and die for the salvation of undeserving people. He is no different today. If necessary, He would do it again. Hence, it is utterly impossible for anyone He came to save to suffer eternal damnation. *“For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed,”* (Mal 3:6). *“Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee,”* (Jer 31:3).

Arminianism has an interpretation of natural death that rates little better than pagan superstition. It says death is the one and only thing that can terminate the love of God. Verily, a man can commit the most egregious sin and do nothing to deter the love of God for him provided he manages to stay alive, but the moment he dies, all this love can instantly be transformed into eternal hatred and wrath. Such ideas are not only contradicted by scripture and reason, but also by the very testimony of conscience. A dying man will receive the sympathy and pity of almost anyone, even by his enemies, but Arminianism says this is the very type of man who is on the precipice of divine hatred. When listing things that cannot separate us from the love of God, the very first thing Paul named was death: *“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord,”* (Rom 8:38-39). If Christ loves a man before he dies, He will continue to love him after He dies. If Christ will bless him with undeserved grace before he dies, then death can do nothing to change this. The eternal love of Christ allows no other conclusion but that

salvation is itself eternal. *“Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity,”* (2Tim 2:19).

6) The doctrine of preservation represents apostates exactly as the Bible does: It says these people were never truly saved. In describing such apostates, John said, *“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us,”* (1Jn 2:19). This explanation is exactly what the doctrine of preservation would predict. John did not say these apostates were once of us but thereafter left us. He says they were never truly of us. Further, he did not say their apostasy changed what they were; rather, it *manifested* what they had been all along. The same principle was applied by Peter: *“But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, the dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire,”* (2Pet 2:22). A washed hog is still by nature a hog, and will manifest that nature if given opportunity. Peter says apostates are analogous. They might have an appearance of religion, but it is not real, and will manifest itself as bogus in sufficient time. These texts also give formidable proof that salvation is not the mere legal matter that Arminianism supposes. It is both legal and vital. A saved man is a changed man.

The same principle applies to Judas, a man that Arminianism commonly presents as an example of one who supposedly fell from salvation. Its argument is based on Jn 17:12 where Jesus said none had been lost but the son of perdition. This argument fails to consider Jn 6:70 where Jesus said Judas was a “devil” long before he committed his act of betrayal. In betraying Christ, Judas manifested to others what Christ knew he was all along. Judas was never a saved man. The Bible is a book dealing with an invisible God who does many great but invisible things. Consequently, the Bible will sometimes speak as to the appearance as opposed to the reality. The appearance was that Judas fell. The reality was that he was a devil from the outset.

A denial of the doctrine of preservation is a significant error, but even more disturbing are the errors in reason that lead to it. It is symptomatic of underlying maladies that are even worse than itself. First, it reflects the idea that salvation is a contractual arrangement, whereas the Bible plainly and repeatedly states it is a gift. Second, it implies salvation is the consequence of human decision, whereas the Bible emphatically teaches it is the result of divine decision. Third, it reflects the idea that salvation is sustained by the fragile power of man, whereas the Bible says it is sustained by the infinite power of God. Fourth, it casts aside the vital aspects of salvation, reducing it to a merely legal matter. Fifth, it fails to understand that eternal salvation is a current possession of the believer and is a working, moving force in his life. Sixth, it implies the love of God can be quenched, whereas the Bible says it absolutely cannot. These are all significant errors that reflect a misunderstanding of the most basic and essential Bible truths.

THE JERUSALEM CONFESSION OF FAITH

While I have not entitled this chapter “Conclusions,” I can find no more fitting way to finish this book. The sum and substance of what has been presented is that “*salvation is of the Lord*” (Jon 2:9), and all the lengthy and technical arguments presented in defense of Primitive Baptist views on Calvinistic issues are really no more than an attempt to foil the subtle attempts of man to qualify this simple statement. We can broadly summarize the matter of salvation in three simple steps that are based entirely in God Himself: We were elected by God the Father; Redeemed and absolved by God the Son, and quickened by God the Holy Spirit. In all cases, the work was *entirely* of God and in no respect of ourselves or other men. This short chapter is included for the benefit of any who remain doubtful of the simplicity of this plan.

Over the long history of Christianity, a great number of creeds and confessions have been drawn by various assemblies of men. Ironically, the least regarded of all these confessions is the one having by far the most authority. It is also the shortest and simplest of them all, being only one sentence long. Since most confessions and creeds were named by the location where they were drawn, we can call this one the “Jerusalem Confession of Faith.”

The history surrounding the Confession is recorded in Acts 15. The New Testament church was then being disturbed by a controversy that would plague Christianity for at least another 2,000 years. The thing at issue was the *terms* or *conditions* of eternal salvation. At that time, certain of the Pharisees claiming to be Christians began to impose new ideas on this subject, being prompted by the recent addition of Gentiles to the church. The Bible says of this, “*But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses,*” (Acts 15:5).

To address this issue, a meeting was held at Jerusalem. Attending were members from both Jerusalem and Antioch – arguably the two most consequential churches in Christian history. Many, if not all, of the original Apostles were there. James, the Lord’s brother was there. Paul and Barnabas were also there, and Titus too (Gal 2:1). Never since the ascension of Christ has there been an assembly with so much inspiration and authority present. While we cannot be sure, it is conceivable that every author of the New Testament Bible was there. The primary author of the Confession was also a man of great authority. This was Peter, the first of the Apostles appointed by God to preach to the Jews and also to the Gentiles. These were the men of whom the Savior Himself said, “*Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven,*” (Mt 18:18). Now with all due respect to their real worth, no such thing was ever said of any man at Nicaea, Dort, Westminster, etc. So the Jerusalem Confession of Faith should capture our deepest attention.

The Bible is clear that the matter was thoroughly discussed (vs 7). It also says their position was carefully recorded in a letter to be distributed to the churches. Then to be absolutely sure, the letter was not sent by U.S. Postal, UPS, or FedEx. It was hand-delivered to ensure there would be no forgeries in transit. Further, multiple men were assigned to accompany the letter to serve as witnesses to its authenticity. Clearly, the participants of the meeting wanted to leave no doubt whatsoever as to their position. We are constrained to say that, given the care and effort they invested, anyone in the time since who failed to know the answer did so without much excuse.

So then, what did the Confession have to say? Insofar as the conditions of salvation are concerned, their letter said *absolutely nothing* – a fact that should not be dismissed to oversight, because the conclusion of the proceedings was almost as simple, with the exact words being:

But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. – Acts 15:11

Observe that in this brief Confession, there is absolutely no mention of sacraments nor of good works nor of the “Sinner’s Prayer” nor of “Roman Road” nor of the “five-step plan” or “six-step plan” nor even of “the means of grace.” Now remember, all these Spirit-filled, Christ-ordained authorities were gathered for the *specific* and *explicit* purpose of addressing the age-old question as to the conditions of salvation, yet they said *absolutely nothing* concerning *any* of these things. Yes, the very men, who above all men in history, taught us to believe on Jesus Christ, to be baptized, to love, to pray, to obey and to evangelize the world, said *not a word*, in either their deliberations or their letter, to even suggest that *any* of such things were conditions of salvation.

One cannot dismiss the simplicity of this Confession by pretending that the letter was only to be addressed to static churches consisting of long-standing Christians whose salvation was a settled matter. Rather, this letter was to be distributed to churches who were part of an explosive movement the likes of which no subsequent Christian revival would ever match. The biggest mega-church in modern America could not equal it. Even at Jerusalem, in the midst of the blinded, stumbling Jews, the church was then adding *daily* such as should be saved (Acts 3:47). How much more among the Gentiles, who were also growing *daily* (Acts 16:5)? So even before this letter would reach its various destinations, large numbers of additional new Christians were apt to have been added, with all of them anxious to learn the answer to the momentous question that still intrigues today.

So why is it that neither the deliberations nor the letter made mention of any of the things that millions now allege to be means or conditions of salvation? Is this the greatest oversight in the history of Christianity? Or could it be that the Apostles actually interpreted all these presumed conditions as actually being *tests* and *confirmations* of eternal life and not its *causes* or *means*? Could it be that the Apostles understand that all these things were for the purpose of *giving* glory to God for His grace rather than *getting* glory from God for our obedience to the gospel? Yes indeed, the Jerusalem Confession of Faith is absolutely a complete statement. It need not be amended with “if” or “and” or “but.” Truly, “if-and-but-ism” was the very heresy the assembly was gathered to refute, though, sadly, the error still remains 2000 years later.

But what about believing in Jesus Christ? Is this not a condition to being saved? In answer to this, observe how Peter said of the believing Gentiles that God “*put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith,*” (vs 9). Does this not imply that God got to the believer before the believer could ever get to God? Let none question that believers are saved and unbelievers are damned (Mk 16:16), but the Apostles did not see this as being any qualification *whatsoever* to the claim that “*through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved.*”

Sadly, the simplicity of this principle will provoke resistance from many religionists who will insist upon amending it. Some will even cry “anti-evangelical!” at such unqualified claims of

grace, though this is hardly credible given that even our best evangelical achievements today are pathetic compared to then. Scientists all acknowledge the profoundness of a simple assertion like $E = MC^2$, but be sure this will not be the case in the realm of religion where the Devil is hell-bent that all minds “*be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ,*” (2Cor 11:3).

Most agree that the letter written by the Apostles was solely purposed to restore a state of unity and peace in the church with its mixed cultures of Jews and Gentiles. Evidently, the Apostles thought a divided state in the church was a primary problem that prevented it from proper praise to Jesus Christ for His free gift of grace. What then would the Apostles think of the state of Christianity today with its tens of thousands of denominations – a number that has ironically accelerated with the so-called ecumenical movement? If we truly want to praise Jesus Christ by a state of harmony in His blood-bought family, then our unification absolutely *must* begin with the Jerusalem Confession of Faith.