

“Reformaphobia”

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June 23, 2014**

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Introduction

By “reformed” in our title we refer to the period known as the “Reformation” and to the religious doctrines that were then commonly believed. In recent centuries, these doctrines have fallen into general disfavor among Christians. While the doctrines have enjoyed significant resurgence in the past few decades, especially among Baptists, they remain a minority view, and are sometimes disdained as obsolete by those who have succumbed to the illusion that “modern” is synonymous with “advanced.” The significance of this change in Christianity can be seen by consulting the old creeds of many existing churches both in Europe and America. Elements of reformed doctrine will there be prevalent, though it is apt to be denounced from the corresponding pulpits today. This is especially true of the Baptists, who were decidedly reformed in bygone years, but are now oftentimes as prejudicial against the doctrine as outright Arminians. This would be the case with the vast majority of modern Baptists. The Primitive Baptists are an exception to this. Though they typically consider the term “reformed” very objectionable, the fact is they have consistently contended for the major points of that doctrine throughout their history.

By “phobia” we of course mean an irrational fear or aversion. There is now an aversion to reformed doctrine that is not only resistant to scripture but is also lacking in sense. Those who oppose it will elsewhere assert what necessarily implies it, or else they will be driven by their objections to alternatives which only superficially differ in their implications. A well-reasoned examination of those alternatives will show they do little to obviate the objector’s complaints. Loss of scriptural credibility is always a severe price to pay, but especially when nothing is to be gained by it. Such behavior may be well-described as “phobia.”

Reformed doctrine is essentially built on the following ideas: That man is a fallen, depraved creature who is utterly incapable of recovering himself to a state that is acceptable for heaven. He would not save himself if he could, and could not save himself if he would. Hence, his salvation must be accomplished by a gracious, unsolicited, irresistible and irreversible act of God. It must be gracious because it is undeserved. Being undeserved, there is no divine obligation to give it to anyone, much less to everyone. It must be unsolicited because fallen man, being a loving addict of his corruption, would never pursue it. It must be irresistible because fallen man would otherwise resist it. It must be irreversible because fallen man would otherwise reverse it. Reformed doctrine takes a very low view of man, and this no doubt is a reason why many reject it. The problem for the objectors is that they can be buried in scriptures supporting the reformed view of human nature. Even some opponents of the doctrine acknowledge that the formidable challenge of defeating it centers upon dismantling its anthropology.

The term “reformed doctrine” will prove objectionable to many who otherwise endorse its primary principles. Their objections will be that the doctrine did not originate in the Reformation; that history will show it long-predated the Reformation, and that it had its true origin in the Bible. These objections are all valid, being corroborated both by history and

scriptures. We ourselves object to the term, and will further develop our reasons in the final chapter. However, we use the term for the time being primarily because of its familiarity to typical readers. There is also one sense in which “reformed doctrine” is a descriptive name for it: Excepting only the New Testament era itself, there has never been a time when this doctrine was more widely received than in the Reformation and the centuries that immediately followed.

The Reformation is commonly dated to the invention of the printing press (15th century), when, for the first time in recorded history, Bibles were mass-produced and put into the hands of common people. This initiated an era of enthusiastic Bible study the likes of which the world will never see again. Not coincidentally, this era was paralleled in the secular world with the emergence from the Dark Ages into an age of intellectual accomplishment seldom, if ever, surpassed in recorded history. Indeed, the foundations for many modern sciences were then laid, and one could reasonably argue these represented greater intellectual achievements than most of the elaborate structures that have since been erected on those foundations. Progress also occurred socially, politically and economically. Verily, a reasonable interpretation of history could conclude that the ideologies leading to the United States itself were the offspring of the Reformation. It was an age of reason, and even reason itself became a science. It was in this era that reformed doctrine flourished. It may seem an enigma that man accomplished so much while taking such a low philosophical view of himself, but this will come as no surprise to one who genuinely believes that “*whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted,*” (Mt 23:12). Nor will there be surprise in the fact that in the modern era, where so much preaching is geared to exalt man and emphasize his potential, there is simultaneously a common complaint of “dumbification” across our society.

Being an era of reason, there was a greater demand in the Reformation that things make sense, not only in science but also in religion. Indeed, the sharp distinction presently made between these two things did not then exist. Rather, they were considered as overlapping concepts. This demand for sensibility does not always exist in modern times, especially for religion. Modern tensions between presumed science and religion, and the human passion to appear compliant with both, have led many to become very accustomed to, resigned to, and comfortable with religious contradictions. Science of course can never concede to mystery, so religion is expected to make the necessary compromise. The excuse for this is that, because God transcends human understanding, one should not expect all things in religion to accord with logic. Even some of the most respected theologians of our day are disposed to speak of “antinomy” in the Bible, which can be a white-washed way of saying the book has contradictions. The truth is that the contradictions are only to be found in their stubbornly-held interpretations.

We acknowledge that nothing can challenge the understanding more than the study of God; however, no man in pursuit of a better understanding on any subject would presume to get there along a path of illogic. Solving a difficult problem requires more reason, not less of it. Of all characters in the Bible, none did more to scathe men for inconsistency and absurdity than Jesus Christ Himself. Nor did He ever give the slightest endorsement to any contradiction. It is

therefore unlikely that He would set up a religion founded on antinomy. Christianity is the most reasonable and practical religion the world has ever known. Any interpretation of the Bible leading to unreasonable or impractical conclusions should be spontaneously doubted by anyone whose confidence is placed in Jesus Christ.

The remainder of this work analyzes key aspects of reformed doctrine and the common objections made against it. As indicated by the introduction, the analysis focuses on both the logical and scriptural aspects of the issue. In most cases, the issues considered are disputes between reformed and Arminian theology; however, consideration is also given to some of the more complex disputes between differing reformed views. Reformed theology can of course come in different shapes and sizes. Where variations exist, this work defends the rendition that was commonly taught by historical Baptists. It would be more accurately represented as “Baptist doctrine” than “reformed doctrine,” but the similarities are generally so great that only a trained eye would see the differences. These differences can be on points of principle, but are more apt to be on points of emphasis, with historical Baptist doctrine giving more emphasis to human responsibility while retaining a strong view of divine sovereignty; giving more emphasis to the vital aspect of salvation as opposed to only the legal, and giving more emphasis to the role of the Holy Spirit in regeneration.

Many Christians are justifiably disturbed at ongoing trends in modern churches, and feel an urgent need to return to the basics of Bible-based religion. However, modern changes are extrapolations of trends that started earlier than most Christians suspect. These problems partly originated when tenets of reformed doctrine were incrementally supplanted by human philosophy. This was accompanied by an increasing disregard for New Testament precedent with respect to church practice. The consequence has been a self-feeding process tending toward ever-greater departures from the Bible. The Bible is a coherent book when properly interpreted, but will seem mysterious and contradictory when forced to comply with ideas it never intended to teach. The more contradictory and mysterious it appears, the less apt are men to read it, to take it for its simple meaning and to follow it. Modern problems cannot be remedied until we have addressed the root culprit from which they have grown. The Word of God is the only answer to these problems, but it cannot be this without proper interpretation. To properly interpret the book, one must recognize that its Great Author is the Architect of all sound reason. His book will make sense when properly interpreted, and we must therefore insist upon doctrines that render it sensible. We believe this approach will invariably lead to reformed doctrine, and having arrived at such, the cornerstone will have been set for the second reformation that many Christians now earnestly desire and seek.

Predestination

Nowhere is the illogic of reformaphobia more evident than on the subject of predestination. Many modern Christians will react to the very word as though it represents a form of blasphemy. Obviously, it cannot be this given that the Bible itself uses the word in Rom 8:29-30 and Eph 1:5-11. Add to this the places where the Bible uses the same Greek word or the same concept under different terms. The fact that these objections derive from phobia can be seen in the illogic of the objectors. Predestination is actually implied by their own reasoning, so they contradict themselves in opposing it.

To show that practically all Christians truly believe in predestination, simply present them with 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 intends to do a thing, then for how long has He intended to do it?

The answer to the first question will be negative. God has never done anything by way of accident. The answer to the second question will also be negative (Isa 46:10, Dn 4:34-35, Eph 1:11). If God has ever failed to do anything He intended to do, then how could we have any confidence in being resurrected, saved to heaven, etc, seeing that all these things depend upon God's intent to do them and His ability to execute His intents? As to the last question, if God has ever intended to do a thing, then He has in fact *forever* intended to do that thing. "*Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world,*" (Acts 15:18). Nearly all Christians correctly believe that God has a perfect foreknowledge of the future, but this would be impossible if He had any uncertainty in Himself as to what His own actions will be. So regarding the three questions above, almost any Christian would answer them correctly, and would reject opposing answers as rank heresy.

But if God does only what He intends to do, and never fails to do what He intends to do, and if anything He does was forever intended to be done, then it follows that *anything* God does is predestined. This is not to say that everything is predestined. What men do is not necessarily predestined, and never is it predestined when they rebel against God. But what God does is most surely predestined. Logic allows nothing else. To deny predestination is to affirm that God does nothing. This is Deism – a hopeless doctrine which all true Christians resolutely reject.

All this implies that most of the arguments Christians have about predestination are totally unnecessary, mindless, and only serve to distract from the real issue. All Christians must either believe in predestination or else be inconsistent with claims they elsewhere make. Predestination therefore should not be an issue with any of us. The real issue is this: Does God save sinners or do sinners save themselves? Now if God saves sinners, then sinners are predestined to be saved. What God does cannot be anything else.

Predestination is also essential to avoid conclusions that are both absurd and unconscionable. One cannot make sense of a world having salvation in it without predestination. Consider the case where an innocent young man gets caught in the crossfire of two rival gangs and is shot dead in the street. That our analysis not be distracted by other reformaphobic superstitions, we will assume the age of the young man to be one day beyond the totally fictitious “age of accountability.” Further, the young man had never undergone any of the reformaphobic rituals that are thought to secure eternal salvation; however, had his life been spared, he would have eventually become a faithful servant of Jesus Christ, and would have converted many others to a belief in the Savior as well. Now reformaphobia cannot deny that such a scenario is a real possibility under the assumptions of its system. There is little or no predestination in it, so chance has almost free reign to produce any kind of event. This system also contends that all men are free, moral agents who can at any time turn to Christ by their own freewill and ability. So it cannot deny the possibility that a man who dies before performing the saving ritual might have turned to Christ a later point had he lived. So what will become of this young man?

Many under the delusions of reformaphobia would not hesitate to answer that the young man will go straight to hell. Then, they will bury themselves even deeper in mud by adding that the thugs who shot him can thereafter repent of their sins, undergo the saving ritual, and destine themselves to heaven. Now consider the dubious principle implied by this position: It essentially says that Jesus Christ has compassion and mercy on the *perpetrators* of sin, and will take extreme measures to intervene in their behalf, and will do this for all men without exception, but the *victims* of sin need not expect any such compassion or help. It should be obvious to any rational mind that something is very amiss. This example also exposes reformaphobia as being disingenuous when it complains of reformed doctrine as being unfair. For violation of our basic sense of justice, it would be difficult for any doctrine to compete with reformaphobia.

How else then shall reformaphobia address this predicament? Interestingly, there is one possibility that might seem an easy solution for it, but reformaphobia will in fact seldom pursue it. This is to say that God will simply take into consideration what the young man would have done and save him on that account. The first reason reformaphobia will be hesitant in retreating to this potential refuge is that reformaphobic doctrine always promotes itself as being a means unto eternal salvation. Now if we introduce the principle that God will save people on the basis of what they *would* have done, it follows that reformaphobia has in fact never saved anyone who would not have been saved without it. The second reason is that once we introduce the idea that men can be saved on the basis of what they *would* have done in alternate scenarios, then obviously we must ask where does this process end? Verily, even Sodom itself might have been exonerated under this approach, because the Lord surely said there was a scenario where that city would have acted differently (Mt 11:23). The third problem is the most formidable of all: If one were to undertake to promote such an idea, then where would they find a scripture to support it? So we will leave this alternative and move on to the next. There is no need to waste effort in destroying what no man has undertaken to build.

The next alternative is one which might actually be chosen by some whose minds are confused with reformaphobia. This would be to put the young man in heaven and simply dismiss his case as exceptional. Indeed, they might even say we are not to question such things – an argument that feigns itself as faith, and indeed it is, though it puts much more faith in reformaphobia than it puts in God. The problem here is that circumstances do not allow us to dismiss the matter as exceptional. Since God supposedly left the salvation of the thugs to chance, He left the salvation of their young victim to an even greater degree of chance, even to perilous improbability, and then the same perilous chance propagated to those people who the victim would have otherwise converted, then from these to the third generation, who would have been converted by the second, etc. The case is not nearly as exceptional as reformaphobia would wish it to be.

But the greater problem is in supposing that God has a system of salvation so poorly formulated and so *ad-hoc* that it would need to be propped up by amendments to accommodate a conceivably endless array of such exceptional cases. If anyone believes that God finds common need to make exceptions to His laws, then let them climb to the top of a very tall building and jump off. As they are dropping, they will surely wish to believe that God considers their case exceptional, but when they find themselves approaching the ground exactly as God's law of gravity would predict, they will realize that it is generally not a good idea to explain divine behavior in terms of exceptions. All evidence we have, whether in scripture or nature, says to us that He is a God of law and principle. Since exceptions are a primary means of exposing a defective theory, they cannot be so lightly dismissed, and any attempt to do so may be justifiably suspected as a mere strand of tape to fix a broken model. God does of course make exceptions, as can be seen in His exceptions to the laws of nature in the miracles He performs, but the very word "exception" implies something that should not be assumed unless there is compelling reason to do so.

The root problem exposed by our example is of course that the reformaphobic system leaves entirely too much to chance. It is altogether dubious to propose a God who loves enough to deliver from sin but does not love enough to deliver from uncertainty. If either deliverance represents a greater challenge to God, then surely it is the former. Uncertainty cannot be too much for a sin-forgiving God to fix. It should therefore come as no surprise that the Bible states in numerous places God has delivered from both. This He does by predestination, which is of course the only logical way such a thing can be done. The case considered in our example simply cannot be reconciled with any sensible concept of eternal salvation without somehow including predestination in the mix.

Once we acknowledge that predestination is necessary in some form or another, the next question is: Exactly what is it that God has predestined to remedy the sort of predicament presented by our example? There are only two logical alternatives to this question: The first is that He has predestined all men to an *opportunity* of salvation. The second is that He has gone beyond this and predestined salvation itself. Now some advocates of reformaphobia do in fact assert the first. These have reasoned far enough to see that their doctrinal scheme is doomed

without at least this much predestination. But their position is still confronted with formidable problems: First, it is impossible to see how such a system is corroborated by observation. It is plainly evident that not all men have opportunity to comply with any of the terms of salvation proposed by the various reformaphobic schemes. Who can honestly say that God has granted the multiplied millions of aborted infants an opportunity at salvation if the terms are what reformaphobia claims? But the greater problem is that scriptures clearly, repeatedly and emphatically side with the second alternative. That is, divine predestination applies to salvation itself, not merely to an opportunity of it.

Hence, Jn 6:37 quotes Jesus as saying that all men given to Him would come to Him and that they would in no wise be cast out. This statement simply cannot be reconciled with the idea that God has done no more than predestinate a mere opportunity. Rom 8:29 says we were predestined to be conformed to the image of God's Son, with the ultimate effect being our final glorification. Eph 2:1-4 says we were predestined to the adoption of children, the consequence of which is our redemption and the forgiveness of our sins. Acts 13:48 says we were ordained to eternal life. 1Thes 5:9 says we were appointed to obtain salvation. 2Thes 2:13 says we will not be damned because we were from the beginning chosen to salvation. Indeed, upon considering *all* scriptures addressing the predetermination of God in the matter of salvation, *none* limit this to a mere opportunity. None teach "pre-initiation" or "pre-intermediation." All teach "pre-destination." It is the ultimate destiny that was predetermined.

Some variations of reformed doctrine would differ from others in how they handle the details of our example, but all of them would be agreed on essential principles, and none of them would be challenged by the example like reformaphobia. There are two reasons for this: First, reformed doctrine maintains predestination, and is therefore under no necessity to consent to any chance scenario as being realistic. Second, the fact that a man is a believer, or will be a believer, or would be a believer has deeper and more definitive implications under reformed doctrine than under reformaphobia. These are things that can only be true of the *elect* of God. Reformed doctrine resolutely affirms that all elect of God are predestined to eternal salvation, and that there are not enough thugs on the street or devils in hell to stop it.

Decrees

In this section we will consider an aspect of reformed doctrine that oftentimes provokes objection even from those who are otherwise reformed. Since even generally sound thinkers sometimes have problems with it, we will consider it in detail. The problem concerns the doctrine of decrees, which, generally speaking, is the doctrine of how God planned His Universe.

Before venturing into this, it will be necessary to establish certain definitions. Indeed, most problems on the subject derive from confusion over terms. In the previous section it was demonstrated that all actions of God are predestined. Now the same logic presented there would also dictate that all inaction of God is also in a sense predestined. That is, if God had made a prior decision not to intervene in a certain sequence of events, but to allow those events to fall out according to nature, then this decision toward inaction is no less informed, nor any less resolute, nor any less certain than His decisions to part the Red Sea, turn water into wine, resurrect the dead, or any other event wherein He intervenes against nature. However, it is obviously very needful to distinguish one class of decision from the other. For this reason, the clearest Bible scholars have tended to reserve the word “predestinate” to refer specifically to divine decisions to intervene, whereas the terms “decree” and “ordain” have been used with reference to His decisions in general. Hence, the consequences of a divine decision to allow nature to take its course are said to be “decreed” or “ordained,” but they are not said to be “predestined.” It would also follow that any predestined event is also decreed, but a decreed event is not necessarily predestined.

It was a common claim of reformed doctrine that God did from eternity decree all events that come to pass. This was stated in the Westminster Confession of 1643, which is the most famous of all reformed confessions. The London Baptist Confession of 1689 essentially borrowed from Westminster language, and this was in turn affirmed by the Philadelphia Baptist Confession in 1708, and again by the Primitive Baptist Fulton Confession of 1900. The London Baptist Confession states in the first article of the third chapter:

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.

Such claims are sure to provoke the objection that no room is left by them for the freedom and responsibility of man. These objections are unfounded and are based in misunderstanding. The above statement neither explicitly nor implicitly compromises human choice or culpability. Rather, it states neither more nor less than what is implied by what nearly all Christians believe

about God. So in rejecting this statement, the objector contradicts claims he elsewhere makes. This is of course a classic symptom of reformaphobia.

The following four premises are sufficient to establish the above article. Nearly all Christians will agree with them, and would consider it heresy to deny them:

- 1) God is the creator of all things, including of all decision-making beings in the Universe, whether men, devils or angels.
- 2) God has knowledge of all things, including the choices and actions of any moral being He might create.
- 3) God acted freely in the creation, being limited neither by inability nor physical law, and was obligated to nothing beyond His own justice.
- 4) God is a rational being. By “rational” we mean that His decisions are made with a purpose in view, and that He makes no decision without considering all foreseeable consequences of that decision upon His purpose.

Now since any event that comes to pass is either directly or indirectly a consequence of His original decision to create, it follows that: a) Because God has all knowledge, He knew the event would in fact be a consequence of His decision. b) Because God acted freely, He was under no obligation to either cause or allow the event to transpire, and under no limitation preventing Him from putting an alternate event in its place. c) Because God is rational, the event was considered along with its alternatives within the context of His purpose, and He made the decision that the event would actually come to pass instead of those alternatives. d) Because God has all knowledge, his judgment in any decision cannot thereafter be improved by new information or better understanding; hence, His decision concerning any event is unchangeable. This decision is what the Baptist Confession means by “decree,” and the four premises above imply that decree must pertain to every event that comes to pass.

Under these definitions, to say an event is not decreed is the same as saying God made no decision concerning it. This is untenable. It would either mean that God failed to anticipate the event or else He had no opinion about it. Scriptures are clear that no event escapes the anticipation of God: *“I am God, and there is none like me, 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 46:9-10). *“Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world,”* (Acts 15:18). God is not waiting to see how events will transpire so He can know what to do. Every decision God will ever make as to His own action was made in eternity. He could not have made an informed decision about His own action while being ignorant of any other action. Nor is it possible that God could be without opinion concerning any event. If He anticipated it, then the fact of its occurrence would at least say He was of the opinion not to hinder it. A man may have no opinion of a thing and therefore make no decision concerning it, but this cannot be the case with the Manager of the Universe. The highly complex fabric of

events prohibits this. If one event were unaccounted or out of control, then uncertainty would exist over the entire system. It should come as no surprise that the very hairs of our head are numbered (Mt 10:30). Reason allows nothing else.

No doubt much of the confusion on this subject has derived from the fact that the word “decree” is used in an unexpected manner. In both modern and biblical usage, the word typically means a positive command, whereas it does not mean this in the present context. To say that God had “decreed” all things in the usual sense of the term would mean He had positively commanded all things, including even sin. This is an absurd conclusion since God has done exactly the opposite: He has positively prohibited sin. But while the propriety of the term “decree” could be reasonably challenged, the idea intended by it cannot. As no single word is adequate to convey the intended idea, the best course is to ensure that whatever term is used is carefully defined.

Christians have views of divine providence falling somewhere between two extremes. One view sees God as frequently and pervasively intervening in the affairs of the world. The other sees His intervention as being infrequent, but as being so brilliantly and precisely calculated that it has profound and extensive effect. Many unnecessary disagreements on the doctrine of decrees have derived from such differences of opinion. The question is indeed an interesting one, and the events of life provoke the minds of all Christians to ponder it almost daily. However, our speculations about this should not translate into uncertainties over the doctrine of decrees. Strictly speaking, the doctrine is not about how God *implements* His plan; rather, it is about how He *formulated* His plan. Even if one believes that God seldom intervenes, and that He typically allows nature to take its course, it remains the case that His decision to do this was made under the four premises named above, in which event, the reformed doctrine of decrees must follow. An automobile is a machine requiring constant intervention, whereas an underground water pump is a machine that may operate for years without human attention, but both operate in compliance with a formulated plan.

Christians commonly err on this subject because they tend to view God as a mere spectator of many activities in His Universe. A man may of course be a mere spectator to an event, but this can never be the case with an all-knowing God who is creator of all things. The errant view has its roots in a simplistic view of His knowledge and foreknowledge. We will illustrate this view with an example that admittedly exaggerates the case, but the exaggeration is intended to magnify the error to the point of visibility: First, the imaginary god of their logic commits to the creation of a free-will man who we will call “Andy Accident.” Then, this god looks into his crystal ball to see what Andy Accident will do with the free-will he has been given. This god is then surprised and dismayed to learn that Andy Accident is going to steal a watermelon. So the imaginary god then sets out to repair the mess by adapting his plan to the new information he has just received. Continuing forward in like fashion, he forms the remainder of his plan concerning Andy Accident and concerning his Universe in general. Under this view, the knowledge and foreknowledge of God are viewed as being recursive, iterative and as being at least partly subject

to time-irreversibility. Indeed, apart from the crystal ball, he is viewed as reasoning almost exactly as a man. This is precisely wherein the problem lies.

It is of course a vain thing for any man to pretend to understand the mind of God, but our explanations of it must at least be consistent with claims we elsewhere make, including especially those four premises asserted above. This simplistic view contradicts at least two of those premises. First, it denies God's rationality because it has Him committing to the creation of Andy Accident before considering the foreseeable consequences of this decision. Either this, or else it denies His omniscience because it essentially says God could not know those consequences without an actual commitment to create Andy and place him in time. This reduces God to one who learns by trial and error. Next, it denies His freedom, because it gives no consideration to the possibility that God, being displeased with what He sees in Andy Accident, could simply erase him from the plan, or replace him with another man who would act in a more acceptable way.

The proper view is that, before God ever made any commitment to create Andy, and when Andy was a mere hypothetical concept existing nowhere but on God's blackboard, God knew what Andy would do if created and left to act out his own will. Consequently, any decision to bring Andy into existence was simultaneously a decision to bring into existence everything that Andy would ever choose to do and all consequences thereof. Hence, the divine decision or decree pertains not only to Andy himself but also to all of his actions and their effects.

Now objections are sure to come at this point by those who will claim that such assertions make God causative in Andy's transgression. These objections are not true, and are symptomatic of the same shallow thinking this work everywhere opposes. There is nothing in this correct view that prevents Andy from being as free, responsible and culpable as he would be under the rankest renditions of Arminianism. These things are not at issue. The argument neither adds to them nor does it take anything away. Nor does it disallow the possibility that many things in life occur as dictated by natural law. The issue is simply this: What do the four premises above imply concerning how God *planned* His Universe?

The example also exposes another error that is common in the thinking of many Christians. These will reason that because God grants Andy freedom of will and latitude to exercise it, God has effectively abdicated His sovereignty and control, and has left things to chance and to the vagaries of human will. This is wrong. God knew exactly what Andy would do if created and left to act freely. It was within His power and prerogative to erase Andy from His plan altogether, or replace him with any one of an infinite number of other men He had power to create, including men who, if left to act freely, would have done differently. The fact that Andy is free does not in the least compromise the fact that God is sovereign. This leads to an unusual but inevitable conclusion: We have two intelligent beings, and potentially adversarial ones, that are simultaneously in control. Andy is in complete control of his own actions, and is responsible

for them, yet God remains in complete control of His Universe. Now the majority of Christians will assert one of these propositions at the expense of the other. They are in fact both true. They are completely reconcilable. Indeed, they are inevitable given the premises laid above. The actors on the stage are free and culpable, but God is the one who set the stage and chose the cast.

Nor does this reasoning do anything to compromise God's holiness, though reformaphobia is apt to judge otherwise. The problem here is a naïve view of the world, which is in fact a formidable hindrance to reformaphobic reasoning on other points as well. It is assumed that if God acts in righteous ways then nothing but righteousness will come of it. The truth is that much evil in this depraved world is occasioned by God's righteousness. For example, God did a gracious thing to grant Andy an existence, and to endow him with capacity for choice. Be sure that Andy will have no complaints about either. It was Andy's abuse of these gifts that led to the transgression. One can scarcely think of any good thing that God might do which would not be abused in such manner by some depraved man. For example, if God were to bless one man with an exceptional ability to preach, it might provoke envy in another preacher having only average ability. If God were to bless a man with comfort and wealth, the man might respond with materialism and apathy, or even harden his heart, as in the case of Pharaoh. If God were to bless this world by sending His Son to preach the truth, those who hate the truth might crucify Him. God is indeed holy in all He does, but it is naïve to suppose that nothing evil comes of this. It is even more unreasonable to insist that God should stop doing these good things on account of the evil reactions they provoke. But one can be sure that those good things will be administered as part of a comprehensive plan, and in a precisely calculated way, such that the bad reactions to them can be overruled to foil the designs of their perpetrators and to fulfill the designs of God (Gn 50:20, Isa 10:5-21).

To view the problem of decrees more abstractly, consider two circles, with the larger circle being to the left and the smaller circle being to the right. The large circle represents all *possible* events. The small circle represents all *actual* events, or all events that are pending realities. Next, add to the large circle the possibility of moral beings that are capable of choice. The effect of this addition is to make the large circle vastly larger. It now includes not only the various possibilities deriving from the decision-making capacity of the Creator, but also the various possibilities deriving from the same capacity in the moral beings just added, including possibilities wherein they rebel against the will of the Creator. Now any event in the small circle must also be in the large one. An event cannot become an actuality unless it is also a possibility. The question is: How is an event in the large circle also replicated in the small one? There is only one feasible answer to this question: It is by the decision of God. This decision is what is meant by the term "decree." It is a decision that a possible event will be an actual one. It may transpire by way of divine permission or divine causation, but either way, God is the final arbiter over all traffic going from the large circle to the small one. Because God is rational, all His decisions in this respect were made with reason and with some purpose in view.

Knowledge Versus Foreknowledge

Using these two circles, we can address another issue that has been the occasion of much confusion, yet the difference is almost entirely in terminology. Men who are at essential agreement in concept can think themselves to vastly disagree because of undetected differences in how they distinguish the “knowledge” of God from the “foreknowledge” of God. The mind of God does of course completely comprehend both circles, but His comprehension of the small circle of actual events is properly called “foreknowledge” whereas His comprehension of the large circle of possible events is simply “knowledge.” The distinction is important. An event does not arrive in the small circle without a divine decision or decree, and it would therefore follow that an event is not *foreknown* without a divine decree. This is why it was common for reformers to assert that God’s foreknowledge is based upon His decree. The same statement would not be true of His knowledge. So, for example, God had *knowledge* that the aforementioned Andy would steal a watermelon if created and left to act freely, but this does not become *foreknowledge* until the event becomes a pending reality, which it will do only after God decrees to actually create Andy and allow him to act out his own will. Those who fail to understand this distinction between “foreknowledge” and “knowledge” are almost sure to arrive at some errant conclusions, particularly regarding the second article of the London Baptist Confession, which states:

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.

Many Christians have read this statement and concluded that it intended the idea that if God decreed that Andy would steal the watermelon, He did so without any consideration to His knowledge of what Andy would otherwise choose to do. The conclusion is therefore that if Andy steals the watermelon, it is because he was compelled by divine decree to do so. This is an errant interpretation, and contradicts what the prior article said. The present article does not state that divine decree is without consideration to *knowledge*; rather, it says it is without consideration to *foreknowledge* (the actual word was “foresaw”). God had *knowledge* that Andy, if created and allowed to act freely, would steal the watermelon. This knowledge was considered when formulating His decree. But *foreknowledge* was not considered because at this stage there was nothing for God to foreknow. Foreknowledge applies to pending realities, not to mere possibilities. The theft of the watermelon is no pending reality until a decree is in place to bring Andy into reality and to allow him to act upon his own choice. Generally speaking, one cannot foreknow tomorrow unless there is a tomorrow to foreknow, and there cannot be a tomorrow to foreknow unless God decrees to put it there. The decree must therefore precede foreknowledge.

Unfortunately, there are some Christians of a reformed bent who have not explained the doctrine of decrees in ways that preserve the responsibility of man. These will errantly reason that God

could foreknow an event only if He purposed to compel it to come to pass. This idea goes well beyond what most reformers intended in that it makes God causative in all things, including even the sinful actions of men. God's perfect knowledge of a future transgression makes Him no more causative of that transgression than our perfect knowledge of a past transgression makes us causative of the same. Those holding this errant view are apt to think of themselves as the diametrical opposites of reformaphobes, but the ironic truth is that they both commit the same error in principle. Those with reformaphobia will reason that because they can be a mere spectator of an event, then so can God. Those of the opposing extreme will reason that because they cannot infallibly foresee a thing unless they intend to force it to happen, then neither can God foresee a thing unless He does the same. The two maladies are identical in that both take an overly-simplistic, anthropomorphic view of God.

The Practical Implications of Decrees

A frailty common to every human is to easily succumb to the illusion that many events occurring in their lives, or in the world about them, are mere products of chance, serving no purpose and being no part of any plan. Even the strongest believers in divine providence will do this in time of trouble. Job himself struggled against this tendency in the depths of his trial. The reasoning already presented is sufficient to show that such views simply cannot be reconciled with truths embraced by nearly all Christians concerning God. Further, their errant thinking is opposed not only by reason but also by the clear testimony of observation and experience.

Whether we examine an atom or a galaxy, it and all parts thereof exist for a reason, serve some purpose, and operate according to some plan. Order and design can be seen in all things we examine, and even if we failed to see it, we would assume it nonetheless present. This is the assumption and motivation of all science. True Christians are especially disposed to think this way. A Christian would spontaneously reject the claim that any plant, or any part of that plant, had a chance existence and served no purpose. He would do the same for any animal. He would flee from any doctor who proposed to arbitrarily remove any one of his bodily organs under the claim that it served no purpose. Nowhere do we assume events are driven by mindless chance except as they pertain to our personal lives or human history. In all other things, if we were to witness what had the *appearance* of chance, we would assume the appearance was in fact deceiving, and our inquisitive minds would then set about to discover the true meaning, purpose and mechanics of what we observed.

Personal experience and general history actually serve to corroborate to the same principle. Never will one hear a person relate a past trial or experience by saying that they, at the time of the event, believed it to have been caused or allowed with some divine reason, but they now, after having time to reflect, see it was a mere random event. The opposite is always true: What was initially perceived as chance, whether fortunate or misfortunate, will afterwards appear as playing some purposeful role in events, thoughts and attitudes that followed. The unequivocal

testimony of reason, observation and experience is that the plan of God, so readily seen in *nearly* all things, actually embraces *everything*, but some of it we understand and some of it we do not.

God pressed this point upon Job (Job 38 & 39) by pummeling him with question after question that Job was incapable of answering. Though we live in a Universe filled with questions we cannot answer, never do we allow this to shake our faith. Indeed, it has the opposite effect. The inexplicable complexities of the Universe build our faith that it must be the result of a Master Designer. Also, while we are unable to answer many questions, we always assume that answers do in fact exist. However, we tend to sing a different tune when we cannot make sense of things in our personal lives. In that case, confusion and fear drive us to an irrational conclusion we would never otherwise take, namely, that we are in the grips of mindless, meaningless chance.

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). This is also a clear case of reformaphobia, because 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.

The most common reformaphobic 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. Reformed doctrine agrees that God chose a people, but 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 reformaphobic 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 the reasoning presented in the prior chapter. So the reformaphobic 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 a reformaphobic 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 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. Reformaphobia 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 reformaphobic ministers who have gone so far as to boldly 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 espousing religious doctrines that deny it.

This is especially true with respect to God’s sovereign right to forgive sin. All saved sinners have at times felt the judgment of God pressing hard against them for certain transgressions, yet marvel at His mercifulness toward them with respect to others. Now if we acknowledge that all transgressions deserve punishment, then these experiences of mercy plainly show that God can and does show mercy as He pleases. The same sovereignty that can distinguish one transgression from another can also distinguish one person from another. This is not to say that God is arbitrary or capricious in His judgments. He follows principles in this even as He does in all things, but these principles are not necessarily what men assume them to be, much less what men want them to be, and they do not include a principle of handling all men the same.

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 them 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?”* (Dan 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.”* We 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 reformaphobia typically concedes that divine sovereignty is an active force in temporal matters, but denies that it has much bearing on eternity. It cannot deny it in temporal matters because God has clearly blessed some men with more intellect, information, opportunity, etc., than others. However, reformaphobia cannot be consistent while denying its applicability to eternal matters also. This is because the doctrine argues that what men become in eternity is dictated by temporal events. This is a fundamental difference from reformed doctrine, which contends that what happens in eternity was decided in eternity. If sovereignty favors some men over others in time, then reformaphobia 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,”* (Rom 9:14-15). *“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 9:19-20).

Reformaphobia commonly charges reformed doctrine with predestinating the non-elect to damnation. This is untrue. Few advocates of reformed doctrine 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, reformaphobia 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 reformaphobia 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.

We 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 reformaphobia. 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 reformaphobia. The reason is that reformaphobia 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 reformaphobia 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). Hence, 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 reformaphobia. 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. We acknowledge this idea is supported both by scripture and conscience. However, sound reasoning is thereafter abandoned by conditionalists 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. “*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; hence, 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 him

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 reformaphobia 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, reformaphobia 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 reformaphobia makes it a real point of contention, accusing it of effectively predestinating men to hell.

The first problem with reformaphobia on this point is that it makes the typical error of implicating itself with the accusations it makes. 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 those who are reformed.

Further, reformaphobia does 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, reformaphobia yet again errs in failing to consider the implications of an all-knowing and all-foreknowing God.

Still, reformaphobia will complain that reformed doctrine 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 reformaphobic doctrines at least ostensibly deny human merit in salvation, they have no basis for charging reformed doctrine 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.

Limited Atonement

No doctrine provokes objection from reformaphobia like the doctrine commonly called “limited atonement.” As this is one of the most heated issues of our day, especially among Baptists, it is necessary to consider it in detail. We use the term “limited atonement” because of its familiarity, though “effectual atonement” would be a better name for it. It is in fact *unlimited* in its power to save, and therefore achieves its intended result without a single failure. According to this doctrine, Christ died with the intent of bringing definite salvation to a definite people. This stands opposed to the thinking of reformaphobia, which is firmly committed to the idea that the death of Christ made salvation possible for all but certain for none. Its advocates reason that any other plan would simply be unfair. A fair plan, they say, must give equal treatment to all. As reasonable as this may sound to some, it is beset with the same problems that are typical of reformaphobia. This view of atonement is simplistic, unrealistic, and contradictory to claims that are elsewhere made.

It is an unrealistic view because it is futile and naïve to argue that God is committed to any plan of salvation that treats men equally. The plain facts of reality irrefutably show He is not. Scriptures say the same (Lk 4:23-27, Mt 20:1-16, Rom 9:11-24). Nor is it reasonable to suppose He is somehow obligated to treat men equally. While God treats no man with injustice, the problem here is that all men are justifiably damned. Even reformaphobia concedes this. Such being the case, salvation is an act of divine mercy. It is not an act of duty. Reformaphobia concedes this also. But it is patently contradictory to claim salvation is an act of mercy while also claiming that God is obligated to offer it to all. Consider a man who goes into a penitentiary with a set of keys and releases some of the hardened criminals there without releasing others. Who would accuse him of being unfair in this? He faces no challenge of justice for releasing only some; rather, the challenge he must answer is for releasing *any at all* (Rom 3:26).

Charges of unfairness against the doctrine of limited atonement expose a lack of submission to the scriptural principle that all men are condemned, hell-deserving sinners. Reformaphobia would have no complaint whatsoever against the claim that Jesus did not die for devils. All men can readily see that devils are undeserving of salvation and that their condemnation is a reasonable routine of justice. But this is an acknowledgement that fairness does not require that Christ die for all intelligent, emotional beings, including even men, because any charge the Bible makes against devils is also somewhere made against men. Sadly, the charges against men in some respects surpass those against devils. One could not prove from the Bible that devils rape, ravage and rob those of their own kind (Mt 12:26), but with men these are daily events. To objectively consider the question of whether Jesus died with the intent of saving some, or most, or all, there must be a clear understanding that any issue of fairness could only be raised against the propriety of Him saving *any*.

The reformaphobic view is illogical in that it has Christ, the omniscient Son of God, committing Himself to what He knew would be an exercise in futility. Nearly all Christians acknowledge

that He died while knowing exactly who would be saved by His death and who would not (Jn 2:23-25, 6:64-65). Whether we believe in a conditional salvation or an unconditional one, we can surely agree on this point. If He died for those He knew would ultimately be damned, then the question must be: With what intent did He do it? It is a dubious claim that He died merely to make their salvation possible when He knew all along that no such thing would ever happen. No rational man fishes for bass in a bathtub or hunts for alligators in the arctic. No sane person would ever plow dirt while knowing it would never receive seed, or prepare a meal while knowing none would ever eat it. The concept of universal atonement is therefore fraught with logical problems even when placed in a conditional system of salvation.

Though the mind of God is incomprehensibly complex, it is in some respects easier to ascertain divine intent than human intent. To know divine intent, we need merely examine the final outcome – a rule that does not necessarily work for fallible and failing humans. If Christ died for those who in the final outcome will be justly damned, then either He died to damn them or else He died to make their damnation just. Now the idea that Christ died to damn anyone is totally foreign to the Bible. Indeed, it is contradicted by the Bible (Jn 3:17, Lk 9:56). The idea that He died to justify damnation is also a thing for which there is no scriptural warrant. It would also be a waste of effort seeing that the damnation of all was completely justifiable before He ever set foot on this earth. Verily, this was the reason why He came into the world. So the claim that He died with the intent of making salvation possible for all men may have a good sound to an unthinking mind, but it really makes no sense without being accompanied by a denial of His deity. The only sensible claim is that He, being the omniscient Son of God, died with the specific intent of saving exactly who will be saved – no more, nor any less.

The next logical weakness with the idea of universal atonement actually lies in an area where it considers itself to be strong. This is in the love of Christ. No Christian will deny that the death of Christ was motivated by supreme love. But this raises the question: Is this love universal or is it eternal? Reformaphobia does not seem to consider the fact that it cannot be both. Once we opt for one, we have automatically nullified the other, unless we are willing to accept the idea that God loves those He burns in hell – an idea plainly contradicted by scripture (Jn 3:36, Rom 2:5-9, 9:22, Rev 6:15-17), and is absurd on the very face of it. Therefore, if we insist His love is universal, we have effectively rejected the idea it is eternal. Now in doing this, we have put ourselves in a perilous predicament, because if His love is not eternal, then none of us have any real assurance of being saved. Verily, we will have lost all hope of it. Any possibility becomes certain in sufficient time, so if it be possible for Christ to lose His love, then in eternity it will surely happen. Hence, the idea of universal atonement may have superficial appeal, but in contending for it, we are in effect pleading for the final damnation of the whole human race.

When thinking is built on an illogical foundation, illogical conclusions are the inevitable result. Such is the case here. For example, consider the familiar “car-wreck” sermon, where the unconverted are told that God loves them, and that Jesus died for them, but if they do not allow God to save them, then a fatal car wreck could have Him sending them straight to hell on that

very day. It would therefore follow that all the divine love of which they spoke, for all its alleged sincerity and strength, can be instantly extinguished, and be turned into hate, simply because a tire blows out in the midst of a curve in the road. Indeed, getting oneself killed becomes the unpardonable sin. A man can rape, murder, and steal all he wants, but can thereafter repent of it in a prison cell and go to heaven, but no such forgiveness for a man who fails to see a drunkard in the wrong lane, or neglects to check if an electrical wire is hot, or fails to cover his face when a contagious man sneezes in it. These are the sins for which there is no forgiveness. They are sure tickets to eternal damnation. A man could commit mass murder and send all of his victims to hell, but he himself can later repent of his sin and go to heaven; hence, the sin of killing can be forgiven, but the sin of getting killed is unpardonable. Such are the patent absurdities of this type of thinking.

Given these conclusions, it is no wonder that the Bible, a book of unflawed logic, builds the entire system of salvation upon the eternal love of God. There is no other foundation upon which it could be built. In absence of this, the whole system collapses. The Bible says our Savior is “*Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever,*” (Heb 13:8). If we cannot take this statement in its literal and absolute sense, then all hope is lost. But if it is absolute and literal, then because we know who Jesus Christ was 2000 years ago, we know exactly who He is today. He was then the eternal Son of God, with such love for His people that he descended to earth and suffered and died for them to save them from their sins. He did this notwithstanding the fact there was no merit on their part to deserve it. His love for them today is no less, and it is impossible for it to be any more. Hence, were any of those for whom He died to lapse into a state of condemnation, then His love for them, being the same as it was before, would move Him to descend again, suffer again and die again to redeem them. This leaves us with no other conclusion but that it is impossible for anyone under the redemptive love and sacrifice of the Savior to be finally damned. His death was intended to bring a definite salvation to a definite people. The fact that His love is eternal allows no other conclusion.

This same line of reasoning is presented by scripture itself in one of the most famous of all verses: “*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,*” (Rom 8:28). This blessed claim is then supported by a lengthy defense that commences with the proposition that salvation is a predestined matter (vs 29). Paul then reasoned that predestination is the logical consequence of the love of God. His reasoning began with the question: “*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?*” (vs 32). Hence, all needs in respect to eternal salvation are logically guaranteed by the death of Christ. If God would bless unworthy, alienated sinners with this, then He surely would not deny them any other necessity. Obviously, this conclusion presents reformaphobia with the formidable challenge of explaining how God can have redemptive love for the entire human race yet deny millions access to those conditions that reformaphobia says are necessary for eternal salvation. Either Christ did not die

for all men or else the conditions for salvation cannot be what reformaphobia claims. The doctrine must err on at least one of these points, though we say it actually errs on both.

Paul's argument for predestination becomes complete upon showing that God's love can never fail. This will explain why the Apostle next considers the duration of His love: "*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. 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 8:35-39). Observe how that not even death can separate from the love of Christ. This destroys the reformaphobic idea that men can be loved by God in life but sent to hell by Him in death. Death and life are the first things named in Paul's list of things that cannot separate from the love of God. If death cannot do it, and if life cannot do it, then it follows that nothing can do it. Now if the love of God is of sufficient degree to supply every necessity of salvation, and if this love remains of force throughout eternity, it follows that salvation is a predestined matter, and it is upon this basis that we can certainly know that all things work together for good to them that love God.

Nearly all Christians are endeared to Romans 8:28, but many of them seem oblivious to the context in which it is found and its implications. No verse could be more adversarial to the tenets of reformaphobia. The claims of the verse are explicitly founded upon the concepts of predestination and unconditional election. Accordingly, it affirms that the love of God, as revealed in the death of Christ, implies a sure salvation to all embraced by it. Reformaphobia denies predestination and unconditional election, and affirms that multitudes loved by God will finally be damned. Such conclusions would be contradicted by the Bible even without Romans 8:28, but this verse blatantly exposes the irrationality of reformaphobia, because nearly all who are confused by this doctrine also know and love Rom 8:28, yet cling to their errant notions in spite of almost everything the verse says.

These conclusions are reinforced by another well-known verse in the same book: "*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. 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 5:8-10). Therefore, all for whom Christ died were reconciled to God at the time of His death, and all who were reconciled will be saved by His life. The reasoning is that since He loved to such extent that He would reconcile us even when we were enemies, then surely the fact He remains alive serves to guarantee the salvation of all for whom He died. Hence, the conclusions are the same as those implied by Romans 8:28-39. The immeasurable, unconditional and eternal love of Christ forbids the damnation of any who

are embraced by that love. If He died with the intent of saving all men, then we are bound to conclude that all men will be eternally saved.

The Bible also presents the love of God as being causative of other effects in those embraced by it. Since these effects are not universally observed, neither can the cause be universally applied. For example, consider the simple principle in: *“We love him, because he first loved us,”* (1Jn 4:19). Hence, our love for Him is an effect whose cause is His love for us. This statement would not be strictly true if others under the same love responded by hating God. Add to this the important principle in: *“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),”* (Eph 2:4-5). Here the love of God is a cause whose effect is our spiritual quickening. Reformaphobia cannot consent to this. It says God’s redemptive love applies to all men, so it cannot attribute anything to that love except what is common to all men. It says all men have an opportunity to be spiritually quickened, and could therefore attribute this opportunity to the love of God, but the quickening itself must find its cause in something else. Now the verse plainly says our very quickening is an effect whose cause is divine love.

The same principle is taught in: *“For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost,”* (Titus 3:3-5). Again divine love is presented as the cause of our regeneration. Now reformaphobia may contend it is a partial cause, with the remaining causation being in the love and choice of the sinner for God, but this argument is futile since *“we love him, because he first loved us.”* The scriptures allow no escape from the conclusion that we are born again because of the love of God, and we think the conscience of any sincere, born-again Christian will attest to the same. If the effect is not universally observed, then the cause cannot be universally applied.

Another effect of this divine love is the chastisement of all those it embraces. The Bible portrays God as a spiritual parent who chastises His children. However, *all* verses in which this is done also imply this chastisement does not pertain to others: *“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent,”* (Rev 3:19). *“But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world,”* (1Cor 11:32). *“Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law; that thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked,”* (Ps 94:12-13). *“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,”* (Heb 12:6-8).

While reformaphobia is confident its concept of universal atonement will stand on the love of Christ, the truth is that the doctrine collapses on this very point. The concept of divine love it imagines is neither long enough nor strong enough to square with the Bible. It clashes also with both reason and conscience. Were a loving parent to see their child drowning, they would not merely throw the child a rope. They would dive into the water and place themselves at peril before seeing their child die. Reformaphobia says Christ only threw His children a rope – a mere opportunity of salvation from eternal death. In sharp contrast to this, the Bible confirms both reason and conscience in saying: *“The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his,”* (2Tim 2:19). *“Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee,”* (Jer 31:3). *“For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed,”* (Mal 3:6). *“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever,”* (Heb 13:8-9).

Fullerism (i.e. Four-Point Calvinism) Refuted

Notwithstanding all this evidence, human prejudice for the idea of universal atonement has even led some who are otherwise reformed to contend for it. These are commonly called “four-point Calvinists” or “Fullerites,” being named after Andrew Fuller, an English Baptist minister who is commonly credited with being the originator of this doctrine. He is also commonly accused of diverting Baptists from their former views to doctrines they commonly hold today, though most modern Baptists have swung far left even of Fuller, who was himself in many respects a reformed theologian. It is the claim of Fullerites that Christ died for all men, but that only the elect will be moved to receive it, and therefore only the elect will finally be saved. Fullerites therefore acknowledge other reformed doctrines, including total depravity, unconditional election, irresistible grace and eternal preservation, but by means of a subtle twist, they slip universal atonement into the mix. The effect is to produce a doctrine that is less unsavory to typical humans, but this comes at the expense of adding new problems while retaining nearly all of the problems already mentioned. Indeed, it is logically one of the weakest systems proposed by professing Christians. Because this doctrine is presently widespread and seems to be growing, the remainder of this section will consider it in detail.

Central to the idea of four-point Calvinism is what its advocates call the “general offer.” They say there is a general offer of Christ to all men, and this they consider to be a pillar of 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.
- 4) 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 reformed doctrine. 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. Reformed doctrine 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 reformed 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. Hence, 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 four-point Calvinists 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.
- 4) 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.

The Bible does not teach a general offer in the sense advocated by Fullerites. It teaches a general *call* that is accompanied with a promise that Christ died to save all who believe, but it does not promise salvation to unbelievers, nor does it contend that Christ died for them. In the numerous sermons recorded in the Bible, never will one find the preacher declaring to unbelievers that Christ loved them and died for them. Though this is common practice from modern pulpits, there is no precedent for it in the Bible. Because reformaphobia is committed to the idea that all men are potentially saved believers, it assumes Christ must have died for all men. But scriptures teach that all men are hell-bound unbelievers by nature, and that it is only by sovereign, unmerited grace that any of them believe. Fullerites acknowledge such themselves, but they

critically err in oversight of another very crucial fact: It is that the grace whereby we believe cannot be divorced from the death of Christ, but was itself purchased on the cross.

This omission is significant because it fails to appreciate Christ for all He has done. As praise of God and His Son Jesus Christ are the primary aim of all true religion, an error of this nature is a severe failing. According to this errant doctrine, the death of Christ served no purpose beyond making redemption a possibility. It did not in any degree purchase the grace whereby we are regenerated, nor did it purchase the spiritual fruits deriving from such. The doctrine insists that Christ died for all men; therefore, it cannot contend that anything was accomplished by His death beyond what is common to all men. All men are not regenerated; they do not all believe; they do not all repent, and they do not all obey. His death could therefore have nothing to do with any of these things. It did nothing more than purchase a possibility of redemption.

Under the Fullerite system, the driving force moving men to the other things is election, not the death of Christ. It is election that moves men to faith, repentance, regeneration, etc. And this Divine work in election is effectively divorced from the work of Christ, because one is applied only to a special people, whereas the other is indiscriminately applied to all. Verily, it takes a scriptural truth in election and perverts it into an idol that usurps the proper praise of Christ. It says Christ merely made salvation possible but election is what makes it real. Arminianism robs Christ of His glory by making an idol of human choice. Fullerism unwittingly commits the same error in principle by making an idol of election.

Exactly what did Christ buy on the cross? The scriptures are resolute and clear on this point: He bought *everything*. This is clearly 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. Fullerism effectively denies this. It says *some* spiritual blessings are in Christ, but others are to be found in election. It says spiritual blessings such as faith are actually given outside of Christ, being the result of election, and these lead us to Christ, whereby yet more spiritual blessing are acquired. This is hardly possible given the above scripture, which absolutely declares there is no such thing as *any* spiritual blessing outside of Christ.

Indeed, not even is election itself outside of 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. Hence, the Bible does not divorce Christ from election; rather, it makes Him the very motivation and cause of it.

The death of Jesus did far more than purchase a possibility of redemption. We ourselves were bought by it and became His redeemed property: “*For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's,*” (1Cor 6:20). Accordingly, he

elsewhere said, “*For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living,*” (Rom 14:9). His death was also intended to secure to Himself a sanctified people. 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). Four-point Calvinism perishes with the word “and” in this verse. The first part of the verse contends He died to redeem us, which is consistent with Fullerite theory, but the latter part shows the purpose of His death was not limited to this, but included objectives that cannot possibly include all men. There is no way that a *peculiar* people can mean *all* people.

Again, Paul said, “*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). So His death was not only intended to absolve His church with respect to her legal standing, but was also intended for her sanctification. It may be easy to indulge in the illusion that Christ died to make redemption a theoretical possibility for all, but it is impossible to pretend that He died for the sanctification of all. All men surely are not sanctified. Again, four-point Calvinism cannot contend that the death of Christ accomplished anything beyond what is common to all men. It denies that all men are sanctified, and even denies that all have a theoretical possibility of such.

According to the Fullerite theory, Christ is the object to which His people are drawn by the power of election. But according to the Bible, Christ is both the object to which they are drawn and the power that actually draws them: “*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me,*” (John 12:32). By “all men” He clearly means all manner of men. No other interpretation is reconcilable with the facts of reality. Accordingly, the Bible says 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). Now these verses clearly show that Christ did not merely set Himself up as an objective to which men would be drawn, either by election or by human free will or anything else. Rather, He actively seeks out His sheep and draws them to Himself, which has Him doing far more than four-point Calvinism can consistently claim. These works of His cannot be divorced from the cross, because in numerous places the scriptures have them married, and they were therefore part of what He intended to accomplish, and actually did accomplish, by the sacrifice of Himself.

Further, it is in great error to attribute regeneration to election without also attributing it to Christ and His death. This too was part of the grand purchase: “*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). We take the expression “word of God” to mean the Living Word, or Christ Himself, which is corroborated in many ways by scripture: “*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 this work of divine quickening is not only a work of Christ, but it is a work particularly connected with His death, burial and resurrection. 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. Later in the same context he says, *“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).* Therefore, the death of Jesus acquired the spiritual quickening of those for whom He died. This obviously was done unconditionally. As they were dead to all that is spiritual, it could not have been otherwise. Four-point Calvinism readily concedes this point, and correctly claims that only the elect are quickened. But if this grace was purchased by the death of Christ, then the conclusion must be that He died only for those who will ultimately be quickened, which would mean He died only for the elect.

Fullerism acknowledges that non-elect will never believe, but the doctrine is distracted with the question of what would happen if they did. The doctrine stumbles while in pursuit of this question. Its advocates could readily see it is a childish question to ask what would happen if a man could jump Mount Everest, but they fail to acknowledge that one question is as irrelevant as the other. More importantly, the suppositions being entertained so radically differ from reality that it would be a precarious thing to maintain almost any of the other assumptions we would otherwise be 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 men are designed to jump Mount Everest. Now Fullerism seeks to dispense with certain aspects of reality while continuing to assume others, thereby creating a mixture that is dubious even for theoretical purposes.

The effect of a variable can sometimes be isolated and measured by allowing it to change while holding all other variables equal, but this form of analysis assumes that other variables can in fact be held equal. This assumption may not be valid. When certain assumptions are dispensed, other assumptions may have to be dispensed also. For example, if one assumes an earth with no rain, he cannot continue to assume an earth covered in grass. The second assumption falls with the first. Now the scenario in which non-elect potentially believe is one wherein human

depravity no longer pertains. The supposed case is such a radical departure from reality that one should not assume that the scheme of salvation would have any resemblance to the one we know to be real. Fullerites would have been more consistent to assume a regime of outright Arminianism in this imaginary world than to attempt their mixture of inherently incompatible ideas. Human depravity is an inescapable fact of the real world, and is therefore a foundation of Biblical doctrine. When one pulls the foundation out from a building, it is a precarious assumption that the remainder of the building will continue to stand. In the scenario in which men are not depraved, we could no longer assume election would even be relevant, yet Fullerism confidently retains the assumption. Indeed, Christ might have died for all men in that case, or He might have died for none at all. Salvation might have been accomplished in an entirely different way. Even if we insist that non-elect would be saved in the scenario where they believed, this does not imply that election would remain a relevant concept in the imagined scenario, nor does it imply that the intents of the crucifixion in that scenario would have been the same. Saying what God would do in a particular case is a very different thing from saying what He has done with the case at hand. Our purpose is to determine the intents of the crucifixion in the real world, not what those intents would have been in hypothetical ones.

We will end this section by considering the common Fullerite claim that the death of Christ is “sufficient for all but efficient only to the elect.” Judging from the frequency with which this statement is used, it is evidently considered by many to be a profound proverb. Seeing that the statement is a contradiction within itself, it should rather serve as a first clue that something is very amiss. If a doctor were to present a patient with a pill, claiming it to be sufficient for all infirmities, but effective only for stomach ulcers, then the patient should surely suspect quackery. Besides, the primary failure in Fullerite reasoning is that it denies the sufficiency of the death of Christ even for the elect. Much less then can it claim sufficiency for the non-elect. As we have already shown, the death of Christ has far more sufficiency than Fullerism can afford to admit. But even upon laying these objections aside, the statement is vacuous at best. Who could doubt that the death of Christ is sufficient for the salvation of the devil himself 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.

An Examination of the Parable of the Wedding Feast

As already noted, universal atonement is a prevalent doctrine partly because of the common belief that the Bible teaches a general offer of Christ to all men. Some advocates of Fullerism would likely abandon universal atonement were it not for this single point. The general offer is taken by them as an undisputable fact and as a mainstay of doctrinal truth. Universal atonement is then necessitated by the general offer. Now it is indeed true that the gospel is a message intended for all men. It is also true that the gospel denies none who sincerely come seeking salvation through Jesus Christ. But these facts imply a general offer only when a few twists are applied to what scriptures have actually said. These twists are subtle but highly consequential.

This can especially be seen in the reformaphobic interpretation of the parable of the wedding feast – a lesson they feel sure to imply a general offer, which they infer from the widespread call in the parable, particularly the fact that the call was made even to some who rejected it.

Our first reply is that it is precarious business to base conclusions on figurative lessons if there are no explicit statements elsewhere to confirm them, and even more precarious when evidence elsewhere actually serves to contradict them. Figurative lessons are commonly vulnerable to inferences that were never part of original intent. For example, the fact that Adam is presented as a figure of Christ was not intended to imply that Christ was a sinner. The fact that God’s children are compared to sheep was not intended to imply that all of them have passive, timid personalities. These are false inferences drawn from merely incidental aspects of the figures.

The parable of the wedding feast (Mt 22:1-14, Lk 14:16-24) obviously has potentiality for such false inferences. At least four might easily be drawn: First, use of a wedding feast to represent the kingdom was not intended to convey the idea that all aspects of the kingdom are jovial and celebratory. To the contrary, entrance to the kingdom requires self-denial and is comparable to taking up a cross. Second, the parable taken by itself would suggest the principle that many are called but few *choose*, but one can be confident this was not the intended conclusion. Rather, the expressly-stated upshot of the parable was that many are called but few *are chosen*. Third, the call in the parable was not intended to suggest that rejection of Christ is a morally-neutral matter. A man does no wrong in declining what is truly an invitation or offer, but all Christians agree that rejection of Christ both manifests and exacerbates a condemned state. Jesus was emphatic on this point: *“And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city,”* (Mt 10:14-15). Fourth, the fact that those called in the parable are separate and distinct from the bride does not imply that believers are separate and distinct from the bride of Christ. They do in fact collectively form His bride. This aspect of the parable actually serves to discredit the reformaphobic interpretation, as we hope to show later in this section. Now errant conclusions such as these might easily be drawn upon considering the parable in isolation, but are avoided when it is interpreted in light of what scriptures have elsewhere said.

Accordingly, the idea of a general offer is an errant inference from the parable. Some readers will be surprised to learn that the Bible never uses the words “offer” or “invite” in any of its descriptions of the gospel. Rather, it is repeatedly represented as a “call.” The word used in the parable itself is “bid,” but the underlying Greek is translated “call” in countless other places, and “call” is also a term used in the parable itself. To represent it as a mere offer or invitation is disingenuous even to reformaphobic theology, because not even there is it something that can be rejected with impunity. It “bids” or “calls,” and therefore imposes an obligation upon all receiving it. It does not merely “offer” or “invite.” Though the parable taken by itself might suggest such ideas, one can be sure these suggestions were merely incidental, not being among the intended conclusions.

Another problem is that reformaphobia tends to put a slight but consequential twist on the test of faith implicit in the parable. Exactly what is it that the gospel calls upon a man to believe? Reformaphobia commonly replies by saying that a man is to believe on Jesus *as his savior*, or *as his personal savior*, etc. In fact the Bible never represents the test of faith in these terms. Rather, it consistently represents it as believing on Jesus, believing that He is the Son of God, and believing that He was raised from the dead. Of course, believing on Jesus necessarily implies a sincere belief in everything He said – a fact that does not receive sufficient emphasis in many modern pulpits, perhaps because not even some of the preachers could satisfy such terms. Now the scriptural test and the reformaphobic test are not exactly the same. The latter is largely subjective, but the scriptural test is altogether objective. That Jesus is the Son of God; that He was resurrected from the dead, and that His teachings are absolutely infallible and authoritative, are objective realities to which any thinking mind is liable. This explains why men exacerbate their condemnation in rejecting Him.

But an unregenerate man who does not believe Jesus is his personal savior has done no wrong. He is no less compliant with the Bible than a man who believes He is. Both men fully concede to the truth as it pertains to their personal case. So how is it that a man adds to his condemnation by rejecting Christ? This shows that something is amiss in the reformaphobic test. This test is also inherently illogical. It has a proposition becoming true upon belief of it when it is not true. The unsaved man to whom Jesus is not savior must believe Jesus is his savior in order to make Him such. This convoluted conclusion is surely symptomatic of underlying problems.

It should therefore come as no surprise that on this point also reformaphobia will practice its usual habit of contradicting itself. This can be seen by considering the fact that it is not uncommon to encounter Christians who are so disillusioned by satanic assault as to doubt their own salvation, yet these same persons continue to sincerely profess a love and belief of Jesus Christ. Now even those who advocate the reformaphobic test would not hesitate to offer encouragement and reassurance to any such despairing saint. But in so doing, there is an admission that the test of faith is not what they elsewhere represent it to be. Though the person doubts that Jesus is his personal savior, his heart is nonetheless committed to a belief in Jesus Christ Himself, and it is upon this basis that any sensible and compassionate Christian would seek to reassure his doubting brother. Believing that Jesus is our personal savior is verily important insofar as our peace of mind is concerned, but strictly speaking, the promise of salvation is not to those who *think* they are saved; rather, the blessed promise is, “*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). The importance of this distinction can also be seen by viewing the problem from the opposite direction: Consider a man who believes Jesus is his personal savior yet denies that Jesus is the Son of God. Reformaphobia would promptly agree that such a man has a delusional confidence in his own salvation.

While salvation is altogether by grace, it is confirmed in the mind and heart by belief in Jesus Christ. Assurance of salvation is therefore the blessing that derives from belief. Now it is

important not to confound the blessing with the terms upon which the blessing is received. To illustrate the distinction, consider the fact that any man who makes a verbal commitment to employment obviously does so upon a belief he will be compensated for his labor, but dilatory actions afterward will sometimes expose a lack of real commitment to the terms of compensation. Accordingly, to believe on Jesus *as savior* does not necessarily measure up to the high standards intended by the Bible when it speaks of believing on Jesus. Our obligation to believe on Him as Son of God and Resurrected Lord is not contingent upon Him being our savior. Rather, the promise and assurance He is our savior is contingent upon our believing on Him as Son of God and Resurrected Lord.

These humanly-contrived twists, subtle though they may be, are particles in the eye that cause a general call to be misconstrued as a general offer. They are well-calculated to prejudice the mind toward reformaphobic conclusions. Substitution of the words “invitation” and “offer” for the scriptural term “call” obviously has this effect. If the Holy Spirit had intended the gospel to be represented in such terms, He had 27 opportunities to do so in the New Testament books. Not once was it done. No Christian believing in the inspiration of the Bible will dismiss this fact to oversight. The parable is itself sufficient to show why such terms were not used. Since an offer makes the final outcome of the transaction to be dictated entirely by the choice of the potential recipient, it follows that a *general* offer has no more being done for one man than for another. The parable flatly contradicts this in its conclusion that many are called but few are chosen.

The errant ideas caused by the word “offer” are then reinforced when the test of faith is changed from its scriptural form. A general call to believe on Christ *as savior* is senseless unless Christ has in fact made an offer of salvation to all men. The simple fact is that He has not “offered” salvation to *any* man. Rather, God by the gospel has called upon all men to believe objective realities concerning His Son. Further, He has declared that all who believe these realities are the beneficiaries of the death of His Son, which naturally follows from the fact that their belief is itself such a benefit.

The following analogy will show important differences between a call and offer: A country under imminent foreign threat may call all of its young men to military service. Those who do not obey 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 savior*, because the obligation to obey it would not be diminished in the least even if He were not savior. The facts that He is the resurrected Son of God, that He is absolutely true in all He says, that He is absolutely authoritative in all He says, and that He has earned title to the entire Universe by His submission and obedience, are all objective realities incumbent upon any rational mind. God has reasonable right to call upon every man to believe these facts with or without reward. Recognition of these facts is therefore no less obligatory to one man than it is to another, and belief of these facts does nothing more to merit compensation than belief that the sky is blue or that the ocean is wet.

Still, many object that God would be unreasonable to impose upon the non-elect a message so adverse and loathsome to their wicked minds as to make belief of it impossible. Even some advocates of reformed doctrine have reasoned in such terms, thereby arriving at the errant conclusion that the gospel has no call whatsoever to the non-elect, and that the non-elect are under no obligation whatsoever 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 could not obey. So they affirm in one case the same principle to which they object in another. 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 a compulsive instinct to survive, yet they all ultimately fail in the struggle. He has given them an inquisitive, exploratory mind, but also given them 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). This occurs when they are compelled to conclude that these otherwise unattainable ends can be achieved only through Jesus Christ.

Both the Law and the gospel have been imposed upon wicked men with the same motivation, namely, to demonstrate the very inability at issue, and the condemned, depraved state from which it derived. 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). It 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 primary intent of the parable of the wedding feast was not to address the extent or nature of the gospel call, but to prophesy its future progress. It was first to be declared by Christ and His

Apostles to the Jewish people, who are represented in the parable by the affluent, privileged friends initially called by the king. These would reject the call. However, the call was given to the Jews a second time by the Apostles after the resurrection of Jesus. This is represented by the second call in the parable, which not only announced a wedding feast, but also announced that all necessary preparations had been made – a feature intended to represent the fact that Christ at this point had secured His victory. Once again, the Jewish people generally rejected the call, with exceptions being among the poor, lame, etc. Because of this rejection, the call was then issued to the strangers on the highways and byways. This represents the gospel being carried to the Gentiles. The parable is an exact prophecy of what we know in retrospect to be the historical path of gospel progress.

The parable could of course intend principles in addition to this. Such breadth and depth of meaning could be reasonably expected of any lesson contrived in an infinite, eternal mind. However, when deeper meaning is sought under guidance of what scriptures have elsewhere taught, the parable becomes a real adversary of reformaphobia and a friend of reformed doctrine. The reason is that scriptures elsewhere represent believers as being the *very bride* of Christ, not as mere spectators to His wedding. The reason for the different approach in the parable of the wedding feast is that it considers the initial stages of the gospel call where there has not yet been a profession of faith in the hearers. At this stage, the gospel is not a marriage to the hearers, nor is it a proposal of marriage to them. There is no presumption at this stage that the hearers are part of the bride, and therefore no presumption they are ones for whom Jesus died. It is rather a proclamation of a marriage to which all are bidden. Only upon conversion are the bidden guests transferred to the role of bride. Hence, the gospel declares to the unconverted a marriage between Christ and His bride, for whom He specifically died, cleansing her of all sin, redeeming her unto Himself, to surely live with Him in heaven. The unconverted are called upon to believe these facts, but their role as bride to Christ, and as being redeemed by His death, are neither assumed nor declared until such time as they believe on Him. The Bible promises the cross only to believers. The problem with reformaphobia is that it misconstrues a call to a wedding as being a proposal of marriage.

An Examination of Rev 22:17

Another verse that is commonly misconstrued as teaching a general offer is: “*And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely,*” (Rev 22:17). Advocates of a general offer will put special emphasis on the word “whosoever” in this text, contending that it implies an offer to all. However, this interpretation puts far too little emphasis on the word “will” and fails to appreciate its profound implications in the context of eternal salvation to depraved sinners.

Had the text said, “whosoever has a goldbrick....,” then all could readily see that a qualification had been imposed, but the Bible teaches that a Christ-denying, Bible-defying carnal man could sooner acquire a goldbrick than transform his depraved, sin-loving will to satisfy the terms of

this proclamation. The corrupt will of man is the very root of his condemnation. His salvation must ultimately be a deliverance from his own will and its consequences. This is a point that even reformaphobia concedes, but it does not recognize that to condition salvation on a pure expression of the will is equivalent to offering sight to a blind man on a condition of seeing, or offering sound legs to a lame man on a condition of walking, or offering cleansing to a dirty man on a condition of bathing. Man is not saved *by* the will; rather, he is saved *from* the will. “*The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord,*” (Pr 16:1).

So the expression “whosoever will” has very different implications in the context of salvation than it would in other matters. Offering strawberry ice cream unto “whosoever will” is a vastly different thing from offering Jesus Christ to “whosoever will.” Unfortunately, it is a difference reformaphobia almost invariably dismisses. Indeed, there have been instances where advocates of a general offer have illustrated the latter case with the former or near-equivalents. Strawberry ice cream is well-suited to the carnal palate of man, so any offer of it is apt to have more takers than not. Jesus Christ is totally adverse to the carnal palate of man. Any offer of Him will have no takers whatsoever among truly carnal men. There is no purer expression of the will than for it to desire Jesus Christ, and therefore no greater demand upon the wicked heart, nor any stronger mark of a heart that has *already* been changed and cleansed by spiritual quickening.

The proclamation of the text is therefore not to men in general, but to those who earnestly *will* for the things being proclaimed, and therefore to those whose hearts have been transformed by divine grace. This is confirmed by the fact that the proclamation is also limited to those who thirst and hear, both of which are marks of the living, not of the dead. It is by means of obedience to this call that spiritually quickened men obtain confirmation of saving grace. Reformaphobia would have found support in the text only had it called upon whosoever *does not* will, or had it called upon such unwilling men to a self-made change of heart. It does not.

Reformed doctrine takes this verse for neither more nor less than what it actually says. This doctrine does not deny the salvation of Christ to any man who earnestly desires it and Him. Indeed, the intent of the term “whosoever” is to convey the idea that the principle in the text is absolute, universal and eternal. God would sooner see His physical laws breached, and the entire Universe thrown into a state of pandemonium, than to see His Son dishonored by having a single believer in Him fail. Reformed doctrine omits only those whose sin-hardened hearts have no sense of any need for the Son, and therefore have no interest or desire for Him. Now the conditional, free-will, general-offer systems of reformaphobia do themselves confess to be powerless to save any such man, and have in fact never saved any man, much less men of this wicked, uncooperative bent. Hence, the reformaphobic objections against reformed doctrine are without merit, and complain of alleged problems which their own system does nothing to fix.

An Examination of Jn 3:16, 1Jn 2:2, etc.

But what of those 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, being willing that all be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1Tim 2:4-6)? These scriptures have long been the supports of universal atonement, but they are interpreted without consideration to what the Bible elsewhere says. Indeed, they are typically interpreted without any effort to reconcile them to an even greater body of scriptures speaking of Christ bringing a definite salvation to a specific people (e.g. Mt 1:21, Jn 6:37-39, 10:11 + 10:26, 11:51, 15:13, 17:1, Rom 8:32-33, Eph 5:25, Tit 2:14, Heb 9:15).

Jn 3:16 is a classic instance of this. Only 20 verses later (Jn 3:36), and in the same chapter, we are told there are people in this world under the *abiding* wrath of God. Yet reformaphobia makes absolutely no effort to reconcile the 16th verse with the 36th. Now the love mentioned in the 16th verse would have very little meaning, and offer very scant assurance, if it admitted the very wrath of God against its objects. To make sense of the two verses taken together, either a limitation must be put on the meaning of the word “love,” or else a limitation must be put on the meaning of the word “world.” Those choosing the former will do so at their own peril and to the peril of the entire human race. A limitation on “world” is the only feasible alternative.

To understand Jn 3:16 and 1Jn 2:2, it is needful to examine the usage of the term “world” in John’s writings. The underlying Greek word (“cosmos”) is one of his most commonly used terms, so we have no lack of data to ascertain its meaning. Almost never does he use the word to mean what reformaphobia takes it to mean in Jn 3:16 and 1Jn 2:2. In nearly all occurrences it is manifest the word does not mean the entire human race without exception. Such occurrences are: Jn 1:9, 1:10, 1:29, 6:33, 7:7, 8:12, 8:26, 9:5, 12:19, 14:17, 14:19, 15:18, 15:19, 16:8, 16:20, 17:9, 17:14, 17:25, 18:20, 1Jn 2:15, 3:1, 3:13, 4:14, 5:19. The word means the world as a general but not universal rule. Also, a thing can apply to the whole world in the sense of being *unique* to the world rather than being comprehensive to it. So when the Bible says Christ is the “*light of the world*” (Jn 8:12), that He “*giveth life unto the world*” (Jn 6:33) and that he is the “*Saviour of the world*” (1Jn 4:14), the meaning is not that all men in the world are illuminated, quickened and saved. Rather, it means that such men as are illuminated, quickened and saved received these things from Jesus Christ. This is because He is the one and only source from which they come in the world. This is the meaning in 1Jn 2:2 when He is said to be the propitiation of the sins of the world. Taking “world” here to mean all men without exception would mean that no man is under the wrath of God; hence, it would imply far more than what reformaphobia contends. The proper meaning is that propitiation only occurs in this world through Jesus Christ.

A similar approach must be taken with the words “all” and “every” in Heb 2:9 and 1Tim 2:6. Oftentimes in the Bible, as well as in common speech, these words do not mean “without exception.” They commonly mean “all kinds” or “every manner.” So Jesus told His disciples

they would be hated of “all men” (Mt 10:33), though the clear meaning is they would be hated of *all manner* of men. They were not hated of all men without exception. Also, the Bible says, “*For the love of money is the root of all evil,*” (1Tim 6:10), which obviously does not mean that every evil act is motivated by money; rather, it means that evil of every kind is motivated by money. Again, when the Lord said He would pour out His spirit on “all flesh” (Acts 2:17), the meaning is *all manner* of flesh (i.e. young, old, male, female, etc.). Even so, Christ has died for all manner of men, and has redeemed to God “*out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation*” (Rev 5:9). For this reason, Paul exhorts in 1Tim 2:1-6 that prayer and supplication be made for “all men,” where again the meaning is *all manner* of men, because the Bible elsewhere specifies certain men for whom we are not to pray (Jer 7:16, 11:14, 14:11, Jn 17:15, 1Jn 5:16). Accordingly, when the text says God will have “all men” to come unto the knowledge of the truth, this must be considered in light of the fact that God is elsewhere said to blind men (Jn 9:39, Rom 11:8), harden their hearts (Rom 9:17-18), give them up to a reprobate mind (Rom 1:28) and send upon them strong delusion (2Thes 2:11). So “all men” must necessarily mean all manner of men.

The most important point is that these verses make proclamations that are true to all men *who believe them*. They are true to all who have believed them, who do believe them, who will believe them and who would believe them. These proclamations are unto all men in the sense that they omit none who earnestly care to be included. Very commonly the words “all” and “every” are limited to an intended audience. The gospel is of course primarily addressed to those who are believers and will be believers. So all men in its primary audience, wherever they may be in the world, are those for whom Christ died to make Himself a ransom. This is a point of special emphasis in the New Testament, because it made a monumental change from Old Testament policy, which included only Jews in most of its promised blessings. Since limited atonement omits none who are true believers, the passionate objections to the doctrine are unwarranted. In contending for universal atonement, reformaphobia not only engages in an exercise that is futile, but it is also one for which it will receive no appreciation. It is pleading for the cause of those who will never believe that Christ’s death accomplished anything for anyone, including for reformaphobes themselves.

Preservation

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. Reformed doctrine adamantly denies this, claiming that eternal life is literally and absolutely *eternal*. This view is commonly called the “doctrine of preservation.” Differences among Christians over this doctrine have led to as many debates as any other aspect of reformed doctrine, 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 reformed. Though modern Baptists have disavowed most other aspects of reformed doctrine, 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 reformed 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 reformed past with new Arminian modifications. The result is an incompatible mix.

The common reformaphobic 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 reformaphobia. 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. Reformed doctrine 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 also an argument that begs the question in that it judges the doctrine under assumptions that only reformaphobia tends 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 conscientiously 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 reformaphobia 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. The natural man can choose not to eat, drink and breathe, but he cannot change the fact that these things are written by God into the very constitution of his being. Accordingly, a saved man may act against his spiritual nature, but he cannot change what God has made him, nor change the inherent need he has as a spiritual man to believe, repent and obey.

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 reformaphobia 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 reformaphobia. 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, reformaphobia 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).

Reformaphobia 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 reformaphobia 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 reformaphobia supposes. It is both legal and vital. A saved man is a changed man.

The same principle applies to Judas, a man that reformaphobia 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.

Immediate Regeneration

In this chapter we will consider a problem that is universal to reformaphobia, and is also common even among advocates of reformed doctrine, though sometimes with respect to the latter it is more a problem of terminology than of concept. The error is also consistently observed in the four-point Calvinism or Fullerism described in the chapter on limited atonement. This error may be aptly labeled “instrumental regeneration.” It is the idea that God effects regeneration or the new birth by the means or instrumentality of man. This doctrine may take various forms. For example, it may make baptism, communion or other rituals to be the means of being born again. Our concern here is with the more prevalent error that human preaching is a means to such.

Every reader of the Bible will know that belief of the preached word is very important. The book provides a simple rule for knowing who is saved and who is not: Believers are saved and unbelievers are damned (Mk 16:16, Jn 3:36). However, this does not imply that belief is a means or cause of spiritual quickening. It is rather the effect and confirmation of such quickening.

Scriptural evidence of this is abundant, but a single verse is sufficient to prove it. This verse is acknowledged by all to be the cornerstone scripture of the new birth: “*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,*” (Jn 3:3). Observe the text does not say a man is born again *by seeing* the kingdom of God or *through seeing* the kingdom of God or *by means of seeing* the kingdom of God. Rather, he cannot see the kingdom of God until he is *already* born again. It would also follow he cannot see the King without being born again, because perception of the kingdom would necessarily imply perception of the King, and perception of the King would necessarily imply perception of the kingdom. When a man perceives either the kingdom or the King, it is because he is already born again. His perception is the effect and confirmation of this fact, not the means or cause of it. Faith is the *fruit* of the Spirit, not the *root* of the Spirit (Gal 5:22).

These considerations show the sense in which regeneration must be “immediate.” It is that regeneration must be *without mediation*. While regeneration is also immediate in the sense of being instantaneous as opposed to being a gradual process, the principal idea intended by “immediate” regeneration is that it is done directly by God alone. In opposition to this truth is the errant idea of instrumental or mediate regeneration, where a man is born again through the agency or means of gospel teachers. The obvious problem with such doctrines is that the Bible clearly represents regeneration as a *prerequisite* for receiving the gospel.

While Jn 3:3 is sufficient to establish the point, there is abundant other scriptural evidence that regeneration is done without human instrumentality, but is instead by the direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the heart. This evidence includes:

- 1) The general idea of John 3:3 is corroborated everywhere in the Bible, which is consistent and emphatic in its claim that man in his carnal state will not receive the gospel. This means the

gospel is not suited to be the instrument of his spiritual quickening. Any instrument is adapted to the thing upon which it operates. Hence, a hammer is adapted to a nail; a screwdriver to a screw; a saw to the wood, etc. The gospel is not adapted to the natural man, and is therefore no instrument to his spiritual quickening (Jn 8:43-47, 1Cor 1:18, 1Cor 2:14, Rom 8:5-8).

2) 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. Even advocates of instrumental regeneration acknowledge there are born-again infants, but they claim they are born again by extraordinary means. This contrasts with scripture, which 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” in the matter of salvation. Further, it does not say a word about “ordinary means” or “extraordinary means” in regeneration, nor does it give the slightest intimation that anyone in any period of time or any circumstance has been regenerated by alternate means.

3) Where men are used as instruments in the scriptures, it is 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.

4) 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.

5) 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 even more 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. The questions are in fact not answered because they are not relevant. Preaching serves to confirm, not cause, the new birth

6) Simple logic dictates that all acts of God must begin with an immediate operation. It is frequently argued that God commonly uses means in His various acts, and that upon this basis, we should submit to the idea that means are used in regeneration as well. There are indeed

countless scriptural examples where God used means, as when He used wind to part the Red Sea, and when He used Pharaoh's dream to deliver Joseph from prison. But by what means did He cause the wind to blow or cause Pharaoh to dream? Ultimately, these acts, and all other acts of God, must be traced to some immediate operation. Those who teach instrumental regeneration must submit to this principle themselves; however, in their system, this immediate operation is upon the will of a preacher, or the will of a Sunday school teacher, or the will of a book publisher, or, in any event, on the will of some man, from which it follows that they have man playing a mediatorial role in salvation that is no less essential than Jesus Christ Himself. Apart from being a dubious claim in and of itself, it is plainly contradicted by John's affirmation that the new birth is not of the will of man but of God (Jn 1:13).

7) 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 is that human shepherds will 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.

8) The manner in which they shall be gathered directly by Christ is indicated the word "voice" where He said, "*and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.*" 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. After stating that people were being quickened by His voice even at that present time, He then added, "*Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth...*" (Jn 5:28-29). Hence, He spoke of two resurrections, one of which was ongoing whereas the other was future. The first is a spiritual quickening and the second is of the natural body. Both of these He said are accomplished by His *voice*, whether as spoken to the unregenerate heart or as spoken to the dead in the grave. Now if the latter will be accomplished without the means of man, then it would follow that such is also the case with the former.

9) The scriptures often speak of those who are predisposed to hear the truth, and these are set in contrast to those who are not. Some of the most common words of the Lord were, "*He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear,*" (Mt 11:15, 13:9, 13:43, Rev 2:7, 2:11, 2:17, etc.). It would be absurd to say this predisposition to hear is the product of hearing itself. Now the scriptures make it clear that natural man cannot hear in a spiritual way (Jn 8:43-44, 10:26-27, 1Cor 2:14, Rom 8:5-9). 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 has been made spiritually alive, and therefore capable of spiritual hearing. Paul spoke of such a case in 1Cor 14:24-25 when describing one who hears the gospel for the first time and believes it: “*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 recognizes the external revelation as being true, whereupon he believes it.

Belief of the preached word is the divinely given and divinely authorized *certificate* of a saved state. A certificate serves to verify a fact without itself being a means or cause of the fact it verifies. For example, a diploma certifies that a man has met academic degree requirements, though the diploma itself never read a book, wrote a term paper, took an exam, etc. The diploma is neither a means nor a cause of education; rather, it is a certificate of such. Accordingly, preaching and belief of preaching are neither a means nor cause of regeneration; rather, they are what certify it. Hence, the believer can rejoice in the assurance he is saved, but his belief is the effect and fruit of his regeneration, not the cause of it. Paul told the Ephesians concerning 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 1:13). His word “sealed” is synonymous with our word “certified,” and this particular text is an exact statement of the principle for which we contend.

Belief in Jesus Christ is the supreme criterion by which a saved state is known, and it is the only criterion which actually serves to confirm it. Other virtues may give *evidence* of a saved state, and therefore give us reason to entertain hopes for those who possess them, but true belief in Jesus Christ actually gives it *confirmation*. It is in this sense that preaching *saves*. As Paul said, “*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,*” (Rom 1:16). Again he said, “*For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe,*” (1Cor 1:21).

Unfortunately, many modern Christians equate the word “save” with “born again” or “regenerate.” This has been the occasion of much error. Seldom is the word limited to this meaning in biblical usage. It is a broad term potentially referring to various aspects of our deliverance, including not only regeneration, but also conversion, sanctification, assurance, resurrection and glorification. It may have reference to one or some of these without referring to others, or it may refer to all taken together. Hence, some scriptures describe us as already saved (2Tim 1:9); some imply we are being saved (1Cor 1:18 per the Greek); others say we are yet to be saved (Rom 13:11). Obviously, a different idea is intended in these various places, and context must be examined to arrive at precise meaning. The term may also be applied to merely

temporal deliverance, or temporal realization of eternal deliverance, or to eternal deliverance itself. Preaching is not what regenerates sinners, but it does “save” them in numerous respects, especially in that it gives their troubled souls the confirmation they have been forgiven through Jesus Christ, and it instructs them how that they, as already born-again children of God, must live to find peace, assurance and meaning.

The New Testament never describes any Old Testament saint as being “saved,” and implies they were not saved in the usual scriptural sense of the term. This is because they did not have the gospel. They were born-again and heaven-bound, but lived without the confirmation that can only come by believing in a Resurrected Savior. Thus, “*These all died in faith, not having received the promises,*” (Heb 11:13) “*And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise,*” (Heb 11:39-40). Concerning our salvation it was said, “*the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you... 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,*” (1Pet 1:10-12). Hence, the suggestion is that these prophets foretold of a salvation they themselves did not possess. As for them, they were “*shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed,*” (Gal 3:23), because “*the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing,*” (Heb 9:8). They were therefore under a “*conscience of sins,*” (Heb 10:2). The plain implication is that they did not have a firm grasp on how they were to be eternally delivered, though no doubt they were. Accordingly, Joel wrote, “*And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered,*” (Joel 2:32) which we know from Rom 10:13 to refer to the salvation we have through believing the gospel, yet Joel spoke of it in future tense as though it did not pertain to his own times. This surely does mean that Joel was unregenerate or hell-bound.

One of the errors commonly accompanying instrumental regeneration is an exaggeration of what Old Testament saints understood about Christ. This obviously must be done if that deficient doctrine is to account for their regeneration. But the Bible says that in the gospel there is “*revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets,*” (Rom 16:25). So the gospel reveals what was not known before. The fact that Old Testament scriptures contained gospel information does not contradict this, because those scriptures were not then understood – not even by those who wrote them – and would not be understood until illuminated by New Testament revelation. Indeed, not even did the Apostles themselves understand those scriptures until after the resurrection. Though these scriptures are clear in retrospect, it is Christ “*who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,*” (2Tim 1:10).

This last scripture is of great importance toward understanding the purpose of the gospel. This scripture has Christ accomplishing two important things: First, He *abolished death* – a thing that can only be done by giving eternal life. Second, by means of the gospel, He *brought life and immortality to light*. The life He brought to light in the second step is obviously the life He

acquired in the first. Much doctrinal error has been caused by confounding these two things, or by assuming they necessarily accompany each other. Life is given by Christ alone. In preaching the gospel, ministers are blessed to bring that life to light, but they are neither a means nor cause of it. Life can exist where there is no gospel, but it cannot be confirmed where there is no gospel. This is demonstrated by the case of Old Testament saints.

An Old Testament saint may be compared to a man who believes he is under a prodigious debt that he is unable to pay, yet a rich friend has in fact paid it for him, but has not informed the debtor of his freedom. While the debtor is truly better off, in his perception nothing has changed. He remains under the burden and anxiety of the debt as though he still owed it, and will never have peace until someone mercifully gives him the good news. The gospel is the good news to contrite sinners that Jesus has paid their debts. By means of this good news there is a real and practical sense in which they are saved. However, this is not the same thing as being regenerated or born again. The preached gospel does not regenerate dead, alien sinners. This is done by the Holy Spirit alone in a direct work on the heart.

The gospel may be described as the means or instrument by which this work of the Holy Spirit is *revealed*, but it is not the means by which it is accomplished. This is conclusively shown in the pivotal words of Christ, “*Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*” The new birth is prerequisite to seeing the kingdom and King, and therefore prerequisite to the effectual hearing of the preached word. As such, the preached word cannot be the cause of it. However, perception and belief in the King and kingdom as preached serve as the observable confirmations of the new birth. After stating the above principle, the Lord added, “*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). This text implies that a proper understanding on this subject requires that a distinction be made between the *cause* of new birth and the *confirmation* of the new birth. This is an important distinction that many Christians fail to understand. The text implies that the new birth is caused by an unobservable force but is manifested by observable criteria. If a man were to see a tree shaking or a tumbleweed tossing about, he would know these are not autonomous actions, but are altogether the effects of an invisible cause. These objects are moving because they are being moved. The wind itself is not observable, but its presence is confirmed by observable effects. Even so, the new birth is altogether *caused* by the unobservable force of the Holy Spirit of God, but it is *confirmed* by the observable effects of faith, repentance and obedience.

When this principle is understood, the doctrine of regeneration can be completely unified around some very simple principles. God does not regenerate in an ad-hoc manner, using different means for different people. Such a notion contradicts what we know about God both from scripture and experience. He is a God of law and principle. In this most crucial matter of regeneration there are universal principles. These principles are: As to the *cause*, this is by the direct work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart. As to the *confirmation*, this is by belief in Jesus

Christ. The cause may be without confirmation, as in the case of Old Testament saints or infants, but the cause is always the same. As Christ said, “*so is every one that is born of the Spirit.*”

This is yet another case where the personal experiences of many readers will corroborate what we have here said. Many a believer began by leading a carnal life with no care for the things of God, but a day came in their experience when they were smitten by a life-changing sense of contrition and conviction. This change may have occurred under circumstances that were far-removed from any preacher or even from a Bible, but the change burdened the heart with a desire to seek out Jesus Christ, His gospel and His book. And even if the change occurred under the sound of preaching, it was likely the same preaching that had been heard many times before but without meaningful effect. Now when such a person is thereafter asked as to the time of their salvation, their instinctive tendency is to point to the time of the profound, life-changing event here described, but then reformaphobia comes along and confuses the mind, saying there was actually no salvation until some humanly-contrived ritual was performed in a reformaphobic church. This is a case where the testimony of the heart is in far greater compliance with scripture than the dogma from the pulpit. Such persons were indeed born again directly by God alone, so without the means or agency of any man, but it was by means of gospel obedience that this gracious work of God was confirmed, and by which gratitude is shown God for His mercy. A true gospel minister performs the honored and needful task of confirming salvation, but never does he diminish the glory of God by claiming credit to himself for what only God can do.

Summary

The issues considered in this work are numerous and complex, yet none of them are more important than a single, simple point that is the root from which most of the other issues derive. This single point is in fact the oldest and most consequential issue in history. 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 reformed doctrine and reformaphobia.

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. This is particularly true of four-point Calvinism or Fullerism, which dismisses its contradictions to antinomy, and says that its nonintersecting claims do somehow converge in eternity. 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 in fact a prime feature of reformaphobia, which builds almost its entire case around the idea that fallen man, by his own choice, can attain a spiritual state, 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 reformed doctrine and reformaphobia 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 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, and which produced a condition of which bodily death is a 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 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 reformaphobic 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.

But 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 thousands of 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 reformaphobia. 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 reformaphobic 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 reformed doctrine 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 “reformed doctrine.” Though we have been compliant with convention in using it, the term should truly be put to rest. This is because it 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 Luther, Calvin, etc. and the Roman Catholic Church, 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 “reformed doctrine,” 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 reformaphobia 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 reformaphobia 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 to anyone who obeys Christ with true love, nor to 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.

We are encouraged to see large numbers of Christians giving serious reconsideration to the doctrines of grace and hope this trend will continue. We are especially thankful to see many Baptist returning to it. We believe study of the Bible will not only lead to the doctrines of grace, but the doctrines of grace will also lead to study of the Bible. The reason is that they harmonize the book, thereby increasing the joy and reward of reading it. If one attempts to impose the alternate views on the Bible, they will constantly encounter difficulties that make reading the book a frustrating experience. This is one reason why so many modern Christians have set it aside. It is also reason why a common template of the modern sermon is to introduce a topic with a text, thereby giving semblance of a scriptural lesson, but the Bible is thereafter displaced with personal experiences, stories, clever but humanly-contrived illustrations and even jokes. Any systematic exposition of the book must be avoided as this would present too many obstacles to preconceived notions that neither the congregation nor the preacher are prepared to forfeit. In many cases this is done without any sinister, premeditated conspiracy; rather, the preacher has responsibly avoided representing himself as an authority on what he does not understand. Nonetheless, the end effect is that Bible is not preached, and the ultimate cause is that it cannot be reconciled with a preconceived paradigm that is held in greater faith than the actual word of God. Bible ignorance, even among Christians, is presently as great as it has been since the Dark Ages. Typical knowledge of it is little more than fragmentary. Most Christians do not have a systematic understanding of the book. As reformaphobia has grown, ignorance has grown with it, partly because it renders sensible interpretation of the Bible futile and frustrating.

Religion is largely built on two fundamental questions. The first is: “Who am I?” The second is: “Who is Jesus Christ?” If a man can honestly and accurately answer these two questions, then he cannot be far from the kingdom of God. The doctrines of grace correctly answer both. Reformaphobia correctly answers neither. Who am I? I am a fallen, ruined sinner whose only hope is in the unmerited grace of Jesus Christ. Who is Jesus Christ? He is literally and absolutely everything. He is not only our possibility of redemption, as claimed by reformaphobia, but is our very redemption itself; the author and finisher of our faith; our objective and our path; our righteousness, our hope, our resurrection, our life and our joy.