

CHOSEN IN CHRIST

An Exposition of Ephesians 1:3-14

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CONTENTS

ELECTION	4
REPROBATION	14
REDEMPTION	27
ILLUMINATION	31
REVELATION	34
RECONCILIATION	36
CERTIFICATION	40
CONCLUSION	42

EPHESIANS 1:3-14

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory.

Although our English translations divide this passage into sentences and paragraphs, in the original Greek it consists of one long sentence. And although the sentence is densely packed with theological content, it is not written in the form of a precise formulation or ordered argument; rather, it is in the form of a doxology.

Some people tend to think that whereas theology in itself is lifeless and useless, our relationship with God should chiefly consist of doxology. But whence comes the content of our doxology? If worship and praise are so important, then it is also important to know whom we are worshiping and for what we offer praise. Once we attempt to answer these questions, we are doing theology.

It is commonly asserted that right theology does not necessarily lead to right worship, and that right doctrine does not necessarily lead to right living. This is misleading, since it is true only in the sense that one may learn the right theology without *truly* agreeing with it. If there is no right worship and right living, then it is either that the theology is not really right after all, or that there is no true assent to what God has revealed. True assent, of course, is granted only by the Holy Spirit through his work of regeneration and illumination.

Paul's doxology is filled with theology. He is praising God about certain things, and it would be impossible to share his reverent awe and enthusiasm without also knowing about these things. Thus the less theology you know, the more shallow will be your worship, and an empty doxology is no doxology at all. Therefore, theology is the necessary foundation of doxology, and doxology is the proper context for theology.

Christian faith and practice are coherent and harmonious, so that you should not have to think one way when you are praying and another way when you are studying. Thus there is really no reason for a "devotional" book to be less theological and more practical or even mystical. And unless there is something wrong with you or with the book, reading a systematic theology or biblical commentary ought to produce thoughts of praise and thanksgiving in you such that they erupt in doxology. It seems that this is what happens to Paul as he reflects on God's grand plan for history and his goodness toward the elect.

The passage consists of one long sentence containing a number of clauses and phrases whose relationship with one another is not always easy to determine, and each thought seems to crowd in on the previous one and blend into the next. For this reason, some commentators have concluded that it is impossible to clearly dissect and analyze.

Nevertheless, there are indications of deliberate structure and design in the doxology. "Bless" is thrice used in verse 3,¹ followed by a seemingly Trinitarian outline, describing the special roles of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in the plan of God and the work of redemption. In theological terms, the passage speaks of election, redemption, and application.² Throughout, Paul repeatedly states the cause ("his will") and the goal ("his glory") of God's predetermined plan, as well as the means ("in Christ") by which God would accomplish it. In addition, the passage anticipates some of the themes that Paul will develop in greater detail later.

ELECTION

Paul begins with the doctrine of predestination, and much of what follows in the letter is in fact an exposition of what God has predetermined to perform (and now has performed or is performing) in history. Since predestination is obviously important to Paul, since all that follows in this letter is wholly founded on God's sovereign predestination and predetermination, and since many commentators seriously err on this topic, we shall take some time to expound on this doctrine.

In eternity, God had chosen an unchangeable number of specific individuals for salvation, and had decided that he would adopt them to be his sons through Jesus Christ. That is, according to his foreordained plan, all would fall into sin in Adam, including the elect, whom he had already chosen. Then, out of this mass of sinful humanity, he would call

¹ "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has *blessed* us with every spiritual *blessing* in the heavenly places in Christ" (NASB).

² For the third item, Hendriksen has "certification" instead (*Ephesians*, p. 71; see v. 13-14), which is correct, but I have chosen a broader term that includes more, such as faith (v. 13).

and draw out his chosen ones, removing them from the kingdom of darkness and placing them into the kingdom of his Son (Colossians 1:13).

His selection of each individual was not based on foreseen faith or works; rather, his decision was made completely apart from the person's decision or merit. This is at least part of what Paul has in mind when he writes that God chose his people "before the creation of the world." In another place, when Paul considers Jacob and Esau in relation to predestination, he writes, "Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad...[Rebekah, their mother] was told, 'The older will serve the younger'" (Romans 9:11-12).

The objection may be that although God did not base his choice on anything that they had *already* done, perhaps he based it on something he knew that they would do; that is, perhaps he based his choice on foreseen faith or works. Against this, Paul says that God announced his decision before the twins were born "in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls" (v. 11-12). In denying that election was based on something that the twins had already done, Paul does not leave open the possibility that election was based on something that they would do. Instead, he altogether denies that election was based on anything in them, but that it was based upon "him who calls" and "God's purpose."

Paul assumes the same principle in Ephesians. God chose certain individuals not because of any foreseen faith or works in them, and not because of their decisions or merits, but election to salvation is based solely on his will (1:5), his pleasure (v. 5), his grace (v. 6-7), his plan (v. 11), and his purpose (v. 11). Again, the emphasis is that God's choice of individuals was done completely apart from anything foreseen in the individuals themselves. As Calvin states:

By this he means that God did not seek a cause [outside] of Himself, but predestinated us because such was His will....In adopting us, therefore, the Lord does not look at what we are, and is not reconciled to us by any personal worth. His single motive is the eternal good pleasure, by which He predestinated us....By this he tells us that God embraces us in His love and favour freely and not on a wage basis, just as, when we were not yet born, and when He was prompted by nothing but Himself, He chose us.³

On the negative side, Paul makes a broad denial that election is based on anything in the individual; on the positive side, he insists that election is based on God's will, grace, pleasure, and purpose. Therefore, theologians who are faithful to biblical teaching are justified in asserting that divine election is "unconditional."

Then, the objection is that perhaps Paul is speaking of a collective election, or that perhaps the object of election is Christ instead of the individuals. That is, perhaps the

³ John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*; Oliver & Boyd/Eerdmans, 1965; p. 127.

only chosen one is really Christ himself, and that God had determined that whoever would freely choose to be in Christ by faith would be included in the "elect" group. However, the passage makes no hint at all toward this direction, but flatly contradicts it. Over and over again, Paul uses expressions like, "he chose *us*," "he predestined *us*," and "he lavished on *us*" – on "us," not Christ.

That God chose us "in him" cannot be construed to imply that we are the ones who place ourselves "in him"! We as individuals never chose to be in Adam, but he was still the federal head of all of humanity, and Paul writes that all fell into sin and death in Adam (1 Corinthians 15:22). Likewise, for the elect to be "in Christ" means only that Christ is the federal head of the elect, and not that each individual could of himself choose to be in Christ, and thus become one of the elect, nor that Christ himself was the object of election to salvation.

Moreover, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:27-30, "But *God* chose...so that no one may boast before him. It is *because of him* that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption." Against those who say that only Christ is the object of election, and that whoever comes into him becomes God's elect, the passage says, "It is *because of him*" – that is, because of God – that you are in Christ Jesus. God is the one who decides who becomes "in Christ," and he is the one who then puts us in Christ by his will and power. Therefore divine election is a selection of individuals for salvation.

Depending on the context, expressions such as "in Christ," "in him," and "in whom" sometimes carry another meaning – namely, they speak of Christ as the agent by which God accomplishes his plans and purposes. Thus Paul says that God "chose us in him," and that he "predestined us to be adopted as his sons *through* Jesus Christ."⁴

This is sufficient to refute the idea of collective election (that is, as a denial of the biblical doctrine of individual election for salvation), which is really a silly fantasy invented to subvert clear biblical teaching.⁵ But another point we can make about this is that, when

⁴ Referring to the phrase "in Christ" (and its equivalents), Peter O'Brien writes, "Often its use is instrumental, signifying 'through Christ's agency'" [Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (The Pillar New Testament Commentary); Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999; p. 97]. O'Brien then makes several ambiguous statements about how the phrase designates "Christ as the 'sphere' in which the divine decisions are made and put into effect" (98), but he is after all referring to "The idea of the incorporation of many into a *representative head*" (98). In other words, "in Christ" (and its equivalents) refers to Christ as the agent or means by which God performs his divine plan. And in other contexts, it refers to Christ as the federal head of the elect. This proper understanding of "in Christ" helps prevent distortions and dilutions of the biblical doctrine of predestination, as well as other false teachings that are based on the phrase. As long as the phrase is ambiguous to people (although its biblical usage is clear), they remain susceptible to all kinds of strange and mystical interpretations. "In Christ" refers to Christ's agency and representation, and not our being "inside" of Christ in a mystical or even physical sense. In fact, *en* in the Greek can be translated "in," "by," or "with," and sometimes "the causal sense of *en* is more intelligible than the local" (Gordon H. Clark, *Ephesians*; The Trinity Foundation, 1985; p. 16). In other words, "in Christ" often means nothing other than "by Christ" or "through Christ."

⁵ See also O'Brien, p. 99.

we are considering the works of an omniscient being, the idea of collective election as an attempt to deny individual election is absurd.

If one affirms divine omniscience, as every Christian must, then to acknowledge God's sovereignty over groups of people obligates this person to also acknowledge God's sovereignty over individuals. This is because an omniscient being does not think of a group of anything without knowing every individual object that makes up the group.

For example, when I use the word "trees" without setting a limit on the word, as in "these trees," I am using it as an universal, as in "all trees." But I do not know all trees, I have made none of them, I have determined none of their properties, and I do not even exhaustively know any one tree in particular. So do I know what I am saying? Not on the basis of empiricism. On the other hand, when God uses the word "trees," he says it as one who has made and who knows all of them. His knowledge of all particular trees corresponds to his concept of the universal "trees." In contrast, when I say "trees," the actual content of my knowledge does not include all trees, although I intend to refer to all trees by the word. Therefore, when God says that all trees are a certain way, he has in mind every tree, that every tree is a certain way, and not just trees in the abstract without the actual content of all trees. Because God is omniscient, to him "trees" must mean the sum of all individual trees, and not trees in the abstract.

If you have two children, named Tom and Mary, then every time you say "my children," you are in fact referring to Tom and Mary in particular. You would not intend to mean "my children" without the actual content of "Tom and Mary." The words, "my children," represent for you "Tom and Mary." Suppose that you are omniscient, but you do not yet have children. In this case, "my children" would still mean "Tom and Mary," since you would know for certain that you will have these children in the future. Therefore, an omniscient being never uses a designation of a group without conscious awareness of all the members of that group. That is, the universal term always represents the sum of all the individuals belonging to the group. A being who lacks omniscience uses the universal term without knowledge of all the individuals in that group, but a being who possesses omniscience uses the universal term with a conscious awareness of all the individuals in that group. This is a necessary implication of omniscience.

Accordingly, when God thinks of a nation, he is also thinking of all the individuals comprising that nation at any given time, since a nation is the sum of all those individuals whom God has chosen to belong under that nation, and he has exhaustive knowledge of every individual. Indeed, he creates each individual to be included in the nation he has chosen for that individual. It is not as if God decides to enforce a given policy toward a certain group, such as male humans, and then allow each human being to volunteer to become members of that group. Instead, God creates all human beings, and groups them together as he pleases.

Therefore, it makes no sense to say that God exercises absolute sovereignty over a group, such as a nation or the elect, without also affirming the necessary implication that he exercises absolute sovereignty over each individual within that group. It makes no sense

to say that God elects a group for salvation without determining which individuals would be in that group, or that he controls a nation without controlling the individuals within that nation. The individuals do not make and move themselves. The point is that even in places where the Bible is emphasizing God's sovereignty over groups, his sovereignty over individuals is implied. This is stated in addition to the many biblical passages that directly assert God's absolute sovereignty over individuals, and not only groups or nations.

The biblical doctrine of predestination opposes the popular assumption that man has free will.

Now, in theological and philosophical literature, free will is rarely defined, and almost never defined in a correct and relevant way. Since freedom is a relative concept – you are free *from* something – in defining free will, we must ask, "Free from what?" If by "free will" we are referring to freedom *from God* in *any* sense, then we must reject it. In this sense, only God possesses free will, since he alone is free from all influences other than or outside of himself.

But if we are referring to freedom from any other thing, then in our context it is irrelevant, because we are considering whether or not we have any freedom in our relationship with God, and not in our relationship with any other person or thing. As Martin Luther writes: "But our question is this: whether he has 'free-will' God-ward, that God should obey man and do what man wills, or whether God has not rather a free will with respect to man, that man should will and do what God wills, and be able to do nothing but what He wills and does."⁶

With this proper definition of free will in mind, the Bible nowhere teaches that man has free will,⁷ but instead it repeatedly teaches that God has absolute sovereignty over man, including all his decisions and actions. Nevertheless, the sinful desire for autonomy is so ingrained in sinful man's thinking that he falsely assumes that he indeed has such freedom, and at times even asserts that the Scripture also acknowledges it.

⁶ Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*; translated by J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston; Fleming H. Revell, 1957; p. 310. I have explained and defended the biblical doctrine of predestination in different places and in different ways. This time, I will invite Luther as my partner by citing him a number of times in the following pages (in the main text and the footnotes). One reason for this is to show that the position I take in this and other books is true to both Scripture and the Reformation. On the other hand, many Protestant writers, and even some professing Calvinists and Reformed theologians, have yielded to certain Arminian assumptions when it comes to divine sovereignty and predestination, and human responsibility and freedom (or free will), so that their theology has become a mixture of incompatible biblical and unbiblical beliefs. Then, they claim that Christians must affirm the resulting contradictions, since they are in fact taught in the Bible, when these contradictions do not come from the Bible at all. In addition, it is impossible to affirm two contradictory propositions, since to affirm both is really to deny both of them in reverse order. When it comes to human freedom, to affirm that man has free will *in any sense* relative to God is to deny both the Scripture and the Reformation.

⁷ "There are in existence expositions and discussions of mine in which I have constantly asserted, up to this very hour, that 'free-will' is a nonentity, a *thing* (I have used that word) *consisting of a name alone*" (Luther, p. 271).

Some commentators cannot resist their sinful urge to defy what our passage teaches and implies. For example, after briefly acknowledging that this passage teaches the doctrine of predestination, Francis Foulkes adds, "This doctrine of election, or predestination...is not set in opposition to the self-evident fact of human free will."⁸ He offers neither biblical references nor his own arguments, but just says that free will is self-evident.⁹ But it is not at all self-evident that man has free will; rather, what is self-evident is that if absolute predestination is true, then human free will is false.¹⁰

Foulkes continues, "It involves a paradox that the New Testament does not seek to resolve, and that our finite minds cannot fathom."¹¹ There is a "paradox" now? How? Where? Why? It is "self-evident" to me that he is a quack, and that his mind is indeed "finite" – very finite. As Luther writes, "There is no conflict in the words of Scripture, and no need of an 'explanation' to 'cut the knot.' The protagonists of 'free-will' create difficulties where none exist, and dream contradictions for themselves."¹² Foulkes, like many others, insists that there is such a thing as human free will when Scripture nowhere teaches it, and then when he comes against the doctrine of absolute predestination, which the Scripture does teach, he cries, "Paradox!" and "Mystery!" In the face of this idiocy masquerading as scholarly exposition, should we not cry in response, "Moron!" and "Lunatic!"? Let it be clear, then, that Scripture contradicts Foulkes, not itself.

If God is sovereign, then man cannot be free – that is, not free from God, his power and his control. However, this does not contradict the biblical teaching that man is morally responsible for his thoughts and actions. The common confusion is that freedom and responsibility are either the same thing – so that they are sometimes even used interchangeably in theological and philosophical literature – or that one cannot be without the other.

The false assumption is that if man is not free, then he must not be responsible. In other words, the assumed premise, often unstated, is that "Responsibility presupposes freedom." However, there is no reason to accept this premise, since by definition,

⁸ Francis Foulkes, *The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries); InterVarsity Press, 1989; p. 55.

⁹ "But the Scripture sets before us a man who is not only bound, wretched, captive, sick and dead, but who, through the operation of Satan his lord, adds to his other miseries that of blindness, so that he believes himself to be free, happy, possessed of liberty and ability, whole and alive....Hence, the work of Satan is to hold men so that they do not recognise their wretchedness, but presume that they can do everything that is stated" (Luther, p. 162). In other words, man thinks he has free will not because it is self-evident, but because he is deceived by the devil.

¹⁰ "For if we believe it to be true that God foreknows and foreordains all things; that He cannot be deceived or obstructed in His foreknowledge and predestination; and that nothing happens but at His will (which reason itself is compelled to grant); then, on reason's own testimony, there can be no 'free-will' in man, or angel, or in any creature" (Luther, p. 317). By "foreknowledge," Luther does not refer to a passive prescience in which God somehow passively receives information about the future, as if the future brings itself about without his deliberate will and power. Rather, in accordance with biblical usage, Luther means that God knows the future because he has decided what he will make happen in the future, so that his foreknowledge equals foreordination: "Do you suppose that He does not will what he foreknows, or that He does not foreknow what He wills?" (Luther, p. 80).

¹¹ Foulkes, p. 55.

¹² Luther, p. 236.

responsibility has *nothing whatsoever* to do with freedom; rather, responsibility has to do with whether one will be held accountable. The first dictionary definition for "responsible" is "liable to be called on to answer."¹³ Since God has given his moral laws to humanity, and since he has pronounced judgment upon those who would disobey, this means that man is responsible. The issue of freedom does not enter into the discussion.

Here I must reprimand many Calvinists and Reformed theologians for being unfaithful to both the Scripture and the theological tradition to which they claim allegiance, because some of them also affirm this unbiblical and irrational assumption that moral responsibility presupposes human freedom. They agree with the heretics that for God's commands to be meaningful, man must be free to obey them.¹⁴ Thus they generate contradictions, antinomies, and paradoxes (or whatever else they may call them) in connection with the doctrine of predestination, and then present them as part of the biblical teaching, when the truth is that the Bible is contradicting *them*, and not itself.

For example, in his *Evangelism and The Sovereignty of God*, J. I. Packer writes as follows:

The particular antinomy which concerns us here is the apparent opposition between divine sovereignty and human responsibility, or (putting it more biblically) between what God does as King and what He does as Judge. Scripture teaches that, as King, He orders and controls all things, human actions among them, in accordance with His own eternal purpose. Scripture also teaches that, as Judge, He holds every man responsible for the choices he makes and the courses of action he pursues....

God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are taught us side by side in the same Bible; sometimes, indeed, in the same text. Both are thus guaranteed to us by the same divine authority; both, therefore, are true. It follows that they must be held together, and not played off against each other. Man is a responsible moral agent, though he is *also* divinely controlled; man is divinely controlled, though he is *also* a responsible moral agent. God's sovereignty is a reality, and man's responsibility is a reality too. This is the revealed antinomy in terms of which we have to do our thinking about evangelism.¹⁵

¹³ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition*. See also *Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition*.

¹⁴ "But the Diatribe is so ruinously sunk in, choked with, and stifled by, this notion of its own carnal fancy, that it is pointless to command impossibilities, that it cannot control itself; but whenever it hears an imperative or hypothetical statement it straightway tacks on its own indicative inferences: 'something is commanded, therefore we can do it, else the command is stupid!'" (Luther, p. 237).

¹⁵ J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and The Sovereignty of God*; InterVarsity Press, 1961; p. 22-23.

It is true that Packer defines "antinomy" as only an "apparent" contradiction,¹⁶ but to him this does not mean that the human mind can resolve it. That is, the kind of antinomy that we are dealing with is not a real contradiction in God's mind, but it appears to be one to us, and it is not something that we can resolve. As he writes, "To our finite minds, of course, the thing is inexplicable."¹⁷ He should speak only for himself – to *his* very finite mind, the "thing" may be inexplicable (since he *made* it inexplicable), but how dare he impose his confusion on the rest of us and even on Scripture itself?

So he says that we must affirm both sides of an apparent contradiction while it still appears to be a contradiction. However, I have shown elsewhere that this is impossible, since as long as two propositions remain contradictory to us (whether or not they are truly contradictory), then to affirm both is really to deny both in reverse order.¹⁸

What is the apparent contradiction? Packer says that it is between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. He correctly states that divine sovereignty means that man is "divinely controlled" (so that man is not free), and for him *this* seems to contradict human responsibility. In other words, he assumes that responsibility presupposes freedom.

But Luther had refuted this nonsense long ago. In *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther writes as follows against Erasmus:

Wherefore, my good Erasmus, as often as you confront me with the words of the law, so often shall I confront you with the words of Paul: "By the law is knowledge of sin" – not power of will! Gather together from the big concordances all the imperative words into one chaotic heap...and I shall at once declare that they always show, not what men can do, or do do, but what they should do!

Even grammarians and schoolboys at street corners know that nothing more is signified by verbs in the imperative mood than what ought to be done, and that what is done or can be done should be expressed by verbs in the indicative. How is it that you theologians are twice as stupid as schoolboys, in that as soon as you get hold of a single imperative verb you infer an indicative meaning, as though the moment a thing is commanded it is done, or can be done?

But there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip! – and things that you commanded and that were possible enough may yet not be

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁸ The *logical* status of an apparent contradiction is exactly the same as a real contradiction until the apparent contradiction is resolved. If one *logically* perceives that something is only an *apparent* contradiction, then he would have resolved it already, and it would no longer even be an apparent contradiction, but there would be no contradiction at all.

done, so great a gulf is there between imperative and indicative statements in the simplest everyday matters! Yet in this business of keeping the law, which is as far out of our reach as heaven is from the earth and just as impossible of attainment, you make indicatives out of imperatives with such alacrity that the moment you hear the word of command: "do," "keep," "choose," you will straightway have it that it has been kept, done, chosen, or fulfilled, or that these things can be done by our own strength!¹⁹

Packer is an especially appropriate example of how many Reformed theologians have strangely and ironically gone wrong on this subject. This is because *Packer translated Luther's book!* I am quite sure that Packer had read Luther before he published *Evangelism and The Sovereignty of God*, since it was released in 1961, and his translation of *The Bondage of the Will* was released in 1957, and he had probably read Luther a long time before that.

Therefore, I must conclude that either Packer disagrees with Luther, or he is just muddleheaded.²⁰ He claims that he wants to be biblical in his beliefs, but if this is true, then he should not add to and impose upon the Scripture his own premise, "responsibility presupposes freedom." At least on this issue, Luther had much more respect for Scripture than Packer.

We would expect an Arminian, who is wholly confused about election, redemption, and conversion, to fail to recognize the simple but clear distinction between freedom and responsibility. But what is wrong with the Calvinists and Reformed scholars who still foolishly assume that responsibility presupposes freedom, making some kind of paradox out of the whole doctrine of predestination, and then say that nobody can resolve it? Do they not cause needless trouble? Are they not lunatics and morons, and like the Arminians, also "twice as stupid as schoolboys"?

With Luther, we must affirm that on this subject Scripture contains no contradictions, no antinomies, and no paradoxes, but that unfaithful and incompetent theologians "create difficulties where none exist, and dream contradictions for themselves."²¹ Scripture teaches both divine sovereignty and human responsibility, and these two do not contradict each other; moreover, human responsibility does not presuppose human freedom.

Then, the question becomes one of justice. The objection is that if this is the case, that is, if God gives moral laws to people who cannot obey them, then would it not be unjust for God to judge them? Again, the objection joins together two different things by pure

¹⁹ Luther, p. 159. In other words, God's commands make men responsible, but this does not imply human freedom (nor ability). Thus to Luther the two are separate. This is the proper Reformed and Protestant (and biblical) position.

²⁰ A more formal explanation is to attribute Packer's blunder (and similar errors in others) to the noetic effects of sin.

²¹ Luther, p. 236.

assumption without argument. Since when and according to whom is justice *necessarily* related to the freedom to obey? Just because you join them in your mind does not mean that they *must* be joined.

Paul anticipates such an illogical objection when he discusses divine election in his letter to the Romans. He comes to the conclusion that God sovereignly determines and controls all things, even the will of man: "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden" (Romans 9:18). But then he continues, "One of you will say to me: 'Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?'" (v. 19).

The objection is the same one that we are now considering. The claim is that since God controls all things, this means that no one can decide against what God has decided. And since God chooses to harden some people, this means that there is no free will to obey God's commands. But then, God has determined to judge disobedience. Since the objector falsely assumes that responsibility presupposes freedom, he asks, "Then why does God still hold me responsible, if I do not have the freedom to obey or disobey?" In response, Paul rebukes the objector, and writes:

But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?

What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath – prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory – even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? (Romans 9:20-24)²²

God is the sole standard of justice, and we must submit to his standard instead of imposing our own false standard on him. Accordingly, God has the "right" to prepare some people for glory, and to prepare others for destruction.²³

As for the charge that the doctrine of predestination encourages licentiousness, there must be something wrong with those who make this objection. Before I heard this objection for the first time, it never crossed my mind that the grace of God could be a license to sin. It

²² "He is speaking of men, comparing them to clay and God to a potter. The comparison is surely pointless – inappropriate, indeed, and futile – if he does not think that our freedom is nil" (Luther, p. 219).

²³ "God is He Whose will no cause or ground may be laid down as its rule and standard; for nothing is on a level with it or above it, but it is itself the rule for all things. If any rule or standard, or cause or ground, existed for it, it could no longer be the will of God. What God wills is not right because He ought, or was bound, so to will; on the contrary, what takes place must be right, because He so wills it. Causes and grounds are laid down for the will of the creature, but not for the will of the Creator – unless you set another Creator over him!" (Luther, p. 209).

is only right that man submits to God and obeys his commands (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Yet some of these objectors speak as if sin necessarily follows grace. Whose fault is it that they think this? The objection poses no challenge to the doctrine of predestination, but it does tell us something about how these people think. In any case, Paul writes that God has predestined us "to be holy and blameless in his sight," so that predestination leads to holiness, and not licentiousness.

REPROBATION

Speaking of those who have been "prepared for destruction," we now turn to the doctrine of reprobation. One may call this doctrine the negative side of predestination, so that whereas in election God chooses whom he would save, in reprobation he chooses whom he would damn.

Since in our passage Paul is stressing the positive side of predestination, or election, and since I have discussed and defended the doctrine of reprobation elsewhere, I would have been justified in moving on without dealing with the topic here. However, although the emphasis is on election, some commentators cannot resist the sinful urge to deny yet another biblical doctrine, and so they take this opportunity to assert that although Scripture teaches election (although they have a false understanding of even this doctrine), certainly it does not teach reprobation. So here I will offer a brief discussion on the topic.

For example, Arthur Patzia writes, "Election to salvation does not imply that God, therefore, predestines the rest of humanity to damnation."²⁴ Right, perhaps it is their own idea to damn themselves? Likewise, William MacDonald writes, "The Bible never teaches that God chooses men to be lost."²⁵

As with the doctrine of election and the heresy of free will, some Calvinists and Reformed theologians again compromise with unbiblical assumptions when it comes to the doctrine of reprobation. For example, R. C. Sproul writes:

The Reformed view teaches that God positively or actively intervenes in the lives of the elect to insure their salvation. The rest of mankind God leaves to themselves. He does not create unbelief in their hearts. That unbelief is already there. He does not coerce them to sin. They sin by their own choices. In the Calvinist view the decree of election is positive; the decree of reprobation is negative.²⁶

Along with many others, he adds that to affirm *active* reprobation is to affirm "hyper-Calvinism," "sub-Calvinism," or even "anti-Calvinism."²⁷

²⁴ Arthur G. Patzia, *Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon* (New International Biblical Commentary); Hendrickson Publishers, 1990; p. 152.

²⁵ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*; Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995; p. 1908.

²⁶ R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God*; Tyndale House Publishers, 1986; p. 142-143.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

Against the above writers and others like them, I affirm that Scripture teaches both election and reprobation, and that both election and reprobation are *active* and *unconditional*.²⁸ Besides Scripture, I find confirmation in the writings of the Reformers.

For example, to cite Luther again, he maintains that the reprobates, and even the devil himself, are "a work of God," and therefore are *in the same sense* subject to divine power and action "than *all the rest* of God's creatures and works." Thus God "moves and works" to operate these evil instruments for his own righteous purposes, and not allowing them to be idle from doing evil:

So that which we call the remnant of nature in the ungodly and in Satan, as being a creature and a work of God, is no less subject to Divine omnipotence and action than all the rest of God's creatures and works. Since God moves and works all in all, He moves and works of necessity even in Satan and the ungodly....

Here you see that when God works in and by evil men, evil deeds result; yet God, though He does evil by means of evil men, cannot act evilly Himself, for He is good, and cannot do evil; but He uses evil instruments, which cannot escape the impulse and movement of His power. The fault which accounts for evil being done when God moves to action lies in these instruments, which God does not allow to be idle. In the same way a carpenter would cut badly with a saw-toothed axe. Hence it is that the ungodly man cannot but err and sin always, because under the impulse of Divine power he is not allowed to be idle, but wills, desires and acts according to his nature.²⁹

As for the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, Sproul writes, "Active hardening would involve God's direct intervention within the inner chambers of Pharaoh's heart," and so he instead affirms "passive hardening."³⁰ But Luther writes:

So God's hardening of Pharaoh is wrought thus: God presents from without to his villainous heart that which by nature he hates; at the same time, He continues by omnipotent action to move within him the evil will which He finds there. Pharaoh, by reason of the villainy of his will, cannot but hate what opposes him, and trust to his own strength; and he grows so obstinate that he will not listen

²⁸ As with election, by "unconditional," I mean that the reason and cause of reprobation of the individuals are in God himself. This is just another way of saying that the reprobates do not design themselves in eternity and then create themselves in time.

²⁹ Luther, p. 204.

³⁰ Sproul, p. 144.

nor reflect, but is swept along in the grip of Satan like a raging madman.³¹

Luther says that God indeed moves within Pharaoh.³² But he also refers to "the evil will which He finds there." This sounds like Sproul when he refers to the evil that is "already there," but they do not mean the same thing.

When discussing Judas, Luther makes it clear how "the evil will which He finds there," gets there: "It is true that Judas acted willingly, and not under compulsion, but his willing was the work of God, brought into being by His omnipotence, like everything else."³³ In other words, it is true that the reprobates "willingly" sin, in the sense that they decide to sin. But this willing or this deciding is "the work of God, brought into being by His omnipotence, like everything else." This does not sound very passive, does it? Lest this is still not clear enough, Luther also writes as follows:

Paul teaches that faith *and unbelief* comes to us by no work of our own, but through the love and hatred of God.³⁴

The king's will cannot escape the action of the omnipotent God by which all men's wills, good *and bad*, are moved to will and to act.³⁵

What I assert and maintain is this: that where God works apart from the grace of His Spirit, He works all things in all men, *even in the ungodly*; for He alone moves, makes to act, and impels by the motion of His omnipotence, all those things which He alone created; they can neither avoid nor alter this movement, but necessarily follow and obey it, each thing according to the measure of its *God-given power*. Thus all things, *even the ungodly*, cooperate with God.³⁶

As Paul says: "We were all the children of wrath, even as others" (Eph. 2.3), *created such by God Himself* from a seed that had been corrupted by the sin of the one man, Adam.³⁷

³¹ Luther, p. 207.

³² "Those who are moderately versed in the Scriptures see that for the sake of brevity I have put forward only a few of many testimonies. Yet from these it is more than evident that they babble and talk absurdly who, in place of God's providence, substitute bare permission – as if God sat in a watching tower awaiting chance events, and his judgments thus depended upon human will....And surely *unless he worked inwardly in men's minds*, it would not rightly have been said that he removes speech from the truthful, and prudence from the old men (Ezek. 7:26); that he takes away the heart of the princes of the earth so they may wander in trackless wastes (Job 12:24)..." (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; The Westminster Press; p. 231).

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 228-229.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 314.

Again, Luther indeed speaks of God working and moving "the evil will which He finds there," that is, he does speak of the ungodly having an evil nature, and it is this evil nature that God works and moves. But Luther does not mean the same thing as Sproul does when he says that the evil is "already there," as if God has nothing to do with it being there. Rather, Luther refers to this evil nature as a "God-given power," and those who are evil by nature have been "created such by God Himself." In other words, the evil is "already there" only relative to what God has actively done in "there" before.³⁸

This is the position of Luther the Reformer. As for Calvin, we find the following in his writings:

Now a word concerning the reprobate, with whom the apostle is at the same time there concerned. For as Jacob, deserving nothing by good works, is taken into grace, so Esau, as yet undefiled by any crime, is hated [Rom. 9:13]. If we turn our eyes to works, we wrong the apostle, as if he did not see what is quite clear to us! Now it is proved that he did not see it, since he specially emphasizes the point that when as yet they had done nothing good or evil, one was chosen, the other rejected. This is to prove that the foundation of divine predestination is not in works.

Then when he raised the objection, whether God is unjust, he does not make use of what would have been the surest and clearest defense of his righteousness: that God recompensed Esau according to his own evil intention. Instead, he contents himself with a different solution, that the reprobate are raised up to the end that through them God's glory may be revealed.

Finally, he adds the conclusion that "God has mercy upon whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills" [Rom. 9:18]. Do you see how Paul attributes both to God's decision alone? If, then, we cannot determine a reason why he vouchsafes mercy to his own, except it so pleases him, neither shall we have any reason for rejecting others, other than his will. For when it is said that God hardens or shows mercy to whom he wills, men are warned by this to seek no cause outside his will.³⁹

Here they have recourse to the distinction between will and permission. By this they would maintain that the wicked perish

³⁸ It is from this perspective that we must understand a number of passive biblical expressions like, "Therefore God *gave them over* in the sinful desires of their hearts" (Romans 1:24). Such passive language is literally true, but only relative to something that God has already *actively* done. Thus when we are not speaking relatively, but absolutely, so that we must refer to how something that is "already there" gets "there" in the first place, then we must speak of God's action as active rather than passive.

³⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*; p. 946-947.

because God permits it, not because he so wills. But why shall we say "permission" unless it is because God so wills? Still, it is not in itself likely that man brought destruction upon himself through himself, by God's mere permission and without any ordaining. As if God did not establish the condition in which he wills the chief of his creatures to be! I shall not hesitate, then, simply to confess with Augustine that "the will of God is the necessity of things," and that what he has willed will of necessity come to pass, as those things which he has foreseen will truly come to pass.⁴⁰

There are many more such passages in the writings of the Reformers, but it would seem unnecessary to pile up more quotations. It is clear that they do not deny but even teach that reprobation, like election, is both active and unconditional.

But now who is Reformed? And who is the Calvinist? Sproul maintains that in the reprobates, evil is "already there" as if God did not put it there – but then how did it get there? Is there another Creator? He says that God "leaves to themselves" the reprobates to sin "by their own choices." But is there another omnipotent metaphysical principle or power by which the reprobates function? Passive reprobation can only follow from a form of dualism, and perhaps an impossible theory of spontaneous generation, but Christian theism necessarily implies active election and active reprobation, since nothing can happen apart from God's active will and power.

Not all recent Calvinists and Reformed theologians think like Packer and Sproul. For example, G. H. Kersten writes:

From the scriptures quoted it is very evident that reprobation is more than letting one lie in the state wherein he fell. It is a *predetermination* of the state of perdition, both of angels and of men, for God also determined to decree some of the angels to perdition, reserving them in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. The reprobate are appointed, ordained, and fitted to destruction....Reprobation is therefore no more a passive decree than election is; it is an active decree.

The Cause of reprobation does not lie in anything outside of God, not even in sin, but in God's absolute sovereignty....Thus reprobation is the independent decree of God from eternity, the sovereign, the decreeing God Himself. It is an act of the Father's good pleasure....

Sin, unbelief, hardness, and whatever else is mentioned as a reason for the righteous judgment of God, all follows the decree of God, and is *not the cause of the decree*. God is sovereign in election, but also in rejection. Both depend on nothing but God's sovereign

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 956.

pleasure, and, being God's decree they cannot be dependent upon some one or some thing outside of God....

As election is not general, neither is reprobation....It concerns certain people, known to God by name.⁴¹

Nevertheless, even though we have shown that active reprobation is consistent with Calvinistic and Reformed theology, we are most interested in what the Scripture has to say. On this subject, Paul writes as follows:

Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad – in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls – she was told, "The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?

What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath – prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory – even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? (Romans 9:10-24)⁴²

⁴¹ G. H. Kersten, *Reformed Dogmatics*; Netherlands Reformed Book and Publishing Committee, 1980; p. 137-138. Earlier I denied collective election and affirmed individual election, and here Kersten, as I do, rejects collective reprobation in favor of individual reprobation.

⁴² Many other biblical passages affirm active reprobation, but we cannot take time to examine them here. For example, see 1 Peter 2:8. Wayne Grudem writes, "This verse does not simply say that God destined the *fact* that those who disobey would stumble, but speaks rather of God destining certain *people* to disobey and stumble: 'as they were destined to do'" (*Systematic Theology*; Zondervan Publishing House, 1994; p. 685).

From this passage we can derive at least four points that are relevant to our discussion on election and reprobation.

First, reprobation is scriptural. Contrary to the claims of some commentators who acknowledge election but deny reprobation, the Bible teaches both, and teaches them in the same passage here.

Second, reprobation is individual. Contrary to the claims of those who insist that reprobation must be collective even if it is scriptural, Paul discusses Jacob and Esau as individuals – not just the nations that would arise from them, but "the twins."⁴³

Third, reprobation is unconditional. When discussing divine election, we already pointed out on the basis of this passage that election to salvation is unconditional. That is, God selected the individuals for salvation not because of anything foreseen in them. But Paul is also addressing reprobation in this same passage, and in the same way; therefore, reprobation is unconditional in the same sense that election is unconditional.

In the light of this, Wayne Grudem blatantly slanders Scripture and shamelessly defies it when he writes, "So in the presentation of Scripture the cause of election lies in God, and the cause of reprobation lies in the sinner."⁴⁴ This is unbiblical and impossible. Paul says that God had decided to treat Jacob and Esau differently "before the twins were born or had done anything good *or bad*." Just as election is not based on "anything good" in the person, reprobation is not based on "anything...bad" in the person, as if the person could create and operate himself, with God passively watching him.

As a longtime professor of theology, Grudem should at least have the clarity of mind to make the simple distinction made by Kersten, who writes, "Sin is the *meriting cause* of punishment. The *determining cause* of the state of reprobation is the sovereignty of God."⁴⁵ This is better, but lest some people distort even this statement, I would add that the determining cause of this very meriting cause (sin) itself is also the sovereignty of God.

Grudem surely must have read what we cited earlier from Calvin: "If, then, we cannot determine a reason why he vouchsafes mercy to his own, except it so pleases him, neither shall we have any reason for rejecting others, other than his will. For when it is said that God hardens or shows mercy to whom he wills, men are warned by this to seek no cause outside his will." If he disagrees with Calvin, then he should say so and then state his refutation, but as it is, his position dishonors God, slanders Scripture, confuses the unlearned, and wastes our time.

⁴³ Recall our earlier discussion that God's sovereignty over groups presupposes his sovereignty over individuals. Just as collective election (as an attempt to deny individual election) is nonsense, collective reprobation (as an attempt to deny individual reprobation) is nonsense.

⁴⁴ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*; p. 686.

⁴⁵ Kersten, p. 138.

Fourth, reprobation is active. Many people claim that even if reprobation is scriptural and individual, it must nevertheless be a passive decree; however, Scripture teaches otherwise.

Paul writes that just as some are "prepared in advance for glory," others are "prepared for destruction." Because of grammatical considerations but also their theological biases, many have suggested that perhaps "prepared for destruction" is meant in the passive sense, so that it is as if the reprobates prepared *themselves* for destruction.

However, a variation in expression does not always signify a variation in sense. For example, suppose I were to say, "I bought this book for myself; the other was bought for my friend." This does not mean that whereas I bought the first book, someone else bought the second one for my friend, or worse yet, the second book bought itself for my friend. The context clearly shows that I bought both books – one for myself, and the other for my friend.

The false interpretation seems to require the constant use of rigid expressions. Instead of saying, "I bought this book for myself, but *the other was bought* for my friend," I would be *always required* to say, "I bought this book for myself, and *bought the other* for my friend." William Strunk would have preferred the second version all the time,⁴⁶ but other than that, why must I submit to this requirement when *the context* is clear enough to determine the meaning, unless the interpreters do not want to accept the clear meaning?

That said, the context of Romans 9 is as follows. Paul writes in verse 18, "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden." It does not say that the people harden themselves. Many want to make it say this, but it does not say it. Then, Paul writes in verse 21, "Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?" Surely the pots do not make themselves! But *this* is the context that Paul gives us by which we must understand the expression, "prepared for destruction" (v. 22).

In addition, God said, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (v. 13). This also indicates that reprobation is just as active as election, that just as God decided to treat Jacob a certain way without basing this decision on anything found in Jacob, God decided to treat Esau a certain way *also* without basing this decision on anything found in Esau. As if it changes anything, commentators are quick to suggest that "hate" here means merely "love less." Fine, but what does that mean? And how much less? Spinach I love, but eggplant I love less. How much less? I *hate* it.

Many Reformed theologians teach that the difference between election and reprobation is that whereas God must actively select and summon out the elect for salvation, he merely passes by the reprobates, as if this exonerates God from some horrible and shameful crime. But active reprobation is no crime – it is God's righteous decree to reveal his wrath and his power (v. 22), and to show forth his mercy toward the elect (v. 23), all for his

⁴⁶ William Strunk, Jr., E.B. White, *The Elements of Style, Fourth Edition*; Allyn & Bacon, 2000; p. 18.

glory. Thus all things are done by God's will and power, and he needs no excuse for his decrees and actions.

Although there is indeed a difference between election and reprobation, both are equally active. The real difference is that there is an additional step in *the execution* of God's decree for the elect. Specifically, in eternity God conceived of and decreed the creation of both the elect individuals and the reprobate individuals, and decreed that both would fall into sin through Adam, but he also decreed that he would save the elect through Christ. When Adam fell into sin, both the elect and the reprobate individuals fell with him. The reprobate individuals are then in their divinely-decreed position, prepared for destruction, whereas the elect individuals await the application of redemption in God's appointed time.

Our opponents then object, "But does this not make God the author of sin?" Many Reformed theologians are quick to deny this charge,⁴⁷ even including those who affirm active reprobation, and they make all kinds of distinctions and qualifications to distance God from sin and evil.⁴⁸ But since the phrase "author of sin" is not even found in the Bible, I wonder why they are so quick to invent or acknowledge an unbiblical phrase, and then scramble to say, "God is not *that*."

Most people do not stop to consider what the phrase means. Specifically, what is meant by "author"? When God inspired the Scripture, he did not physically take up the pen to write, but the creatures did (caused by God, of course). So if you mean by the "authors" of Scripture those who physically took up the pen, then the human writers are the authors. But if you refer to the source of the content – the thoughts and the words – and the very cause that made the human writers take up the pen, and the very power that moved the pen, then God is the author of Scripture.

So if the question is whether the doctrine of predestination makes God a *sinner*, as in one who commits sin or evil, then we must deny it. But if this is what is meant, then let us rephrase the question to say "sinner" or "evildoer" instead of "author of sin." Now, since God is the sole standard of right and wrong, then for him to be a sinner, he would have to establish a moral law for himself, then break it, and then judge himself to be wrong. However, Scripture asserts that he is righteous in all that he does.

But if the question is whether God is the ultimate or even the immediate cause of sin, then we must affirm it, and in this sense, and for those who for some reason want to use the phrase, then God is indeed the "author of sin," because he is necessarily the author of *all things*. The common assumption is that there is something "wrong" with saying that God is the author of sin. However, since God is the sole standard of right and wrong, it is wrong for God to be the author of sin only if God himself has decreed that it is wrong for him to be the author of sin. It is not up to the likes of us to say that it is wrong, and just because some people assume that it is wrong does not make it wrong.

⁴⁷ Sproul, p. 144.

⁴⁸ Kersten, p. 125.

Must we appeal to the Reformers again? But we have given more than a few passages from Scripture, and many quotations from the Reformers. Maybe we will look at one more, but one that is seemingly less relevant to our topic. This is when Calvin says, "Indeed, not even an abundance of bread would benefit us in the slightest unless it were divinely turned into nourishment."⁴⁹ Similar statements abound in Calvin's writings.

Theologians are fond of appealing to "secondary causes" to distance God from sin and evil. They say that God indeed causes sin and evil, but he does it only through secondary causes, and thus he indirectly causes them. However, this does not really distance God from sin and evil because, to begin with, each time God must directly make the secondary causes work the way he wants them to work, and he must directly make the objects supposedly affected by the secondary causes respond the way he wants them to respond. Otherwise, it would be as if we acknowledge a metaphysical principle or power that is different from God but that is as powerful as God, which is dualism.⁵⁰

As for Calvin's statement, although bread is designed to be in one sense a secondary cause by which God nourishes your body, God must still in a real sense directly cause the nourishment, since there is no power in the bread itself to nourish, as if the bread can exist and work apart from God's immediate and direct power. Although this is a necessary element of their doctrinal system, many Reformed theologians seem to miss this simple point.

Now, appeals to secondary causes are legitimate as long as it is correctly applied; however, if the intention is to distance God from the event or the effect (such as murder, rape, etc.) as a way to do theodicy, then the approach fails, because nothing can really distance God this way. It is biblically wrong and metaphysically impossible. Therefore, in this sense – in the sense that God is necessarily the author of *all things* – we must affirm that God is the author of sin. But we will add that this does not generate an apologetic problem, because there is no rational or biblical argument showing that there is anything wrong with it; rather, God and his actions are righteous by definition.⁵¹

The doctrine of predestination is indeed controversial, not because Scripture is unclear or that there are good arguments on all sides, but it is controversial chiefly because sinful man, taught by Satan, demands salvation from God and yet refuses to give him all the

⁴⁹ Calvin, p. 909.

⁵⁰ Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics, Vol. 1*; Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2004; p. 226-227.

⁵¹ Now, James writes, "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed" (James 1:13-14). This is sometimes used against my position. However, all it says is that 1) God is not tempted by evil, which does not contradict my position, and 2) God does not tempt anyone, which is true also, since he causes other things to tempt, including lust and the devil. So James does not contradict my position at all. Rather, Isaiah says, "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things" (Isaiah 45:7, KJV). Of course, many people insist that here "evil" means "calamity" – as if this makes things all better! "Calamity" certainly includes wars, murders, rapes, political upheavals, and so on.

glory. Instead, he reserves a determinative role for himself, asserting that God makes salvation at best possible, but actual for no one until the person permits God to save him.

He convinces himself that he is the master of his soul, and that no one can take it out of his hands. Jesus said, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you" (John 15:16); in contrast, sinful man retorts, "You have 'chosen' me only because you know that I would choose you, so that my will logically precedes and determines your will!" He says, "If conversion is necessary, then by my will I will turn against my (evil) will, by my might I will escape from Satan's hold and sin's grip, and by my power I will turn to Christ and permit him to save me, as if I need him at all."

Sinful man may resent the above as a misrepresentation, and he may hide his real thoughts and motives with beautiful words and reverent expressions, but underneath all of that rest such wickedness and defiance that would be satisfied with nothing less than making himself the center of the universe, so that even God must heed and serve him. And thus "free will" is Satan's slogan, and Arminianism is his creed. On the other hand, Christianity and Calvinism (which faithfully expresses the teachings of Christianity) affirm, "Salvation comes from the LORD" (Jonah 2:9) – that is, *really* and *wholly* from God, and not just partly or even mostly from him.

Yes, the doctrine is controversial, so that even some who claim to agree with us suggest that we should not preach about it. But then do they really agree with us? If what we have been saying is correct, then predestination is inseparably interwoven with any adequate exposition of biblical theology and of the gospel itself. Their suggestion insults God, as if he was stupid, or that he erred in revealing this doctrine to us through the Scripture. In contrast to their impiety, Luther writes:

It is, then, fundamentally necessary and wholesome for Christians to know that God foreknows nothing contingently, but that He foresees, purposes, and does all things according to His own immutable, eternal and infallible will....⁵²

As I said above, what may be found in or proved by the sacred writings is both plain and wholesome, and so may safely be published, learned and known – and, indeed, should be. So your statement, that some things should not be exposed to everyone's hearing, if made with reference to the contents of Scripture, is false; and if you spoke of other things, your remark was irrelevant and out of place, and a waste of your paper and time.⁵³

As for the argument that predestination is best left untaught because of the tumult and disunity that it causes, Luther replies:

⁵² Luther, p. 80.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 86.

What a fulsome speaker you are! – but utterly ignorant of what you are talking about. In a word, you treat this discussion as if the issue at stake between us was the recovery of a debt, or some other trivial item, the loss of which matters far less than the public peace, and therefore should not so upset anyone as to make him hesitate to give and take, yielding the point if need be, in order to ensure that no occasion for public disorder arises. You make it clear that this carnal peace and quiet seems to you far more important than faith, conscience, salvation, the Word of God, the glory of Christ, and God himself.

Let me tell you, therefore – and I beg you to let this sink deep into your mind – I hold that a solemn and vital truth, of eternal consequence, is at stake in this discussion; one so crucial and fundamental that it ought to be maintained and defended even at the cost of life, though as a result the whole world should be, not just thrown into turmoil and uproar, but shattered in chaos and reduced to nothingness. If you do not grasp that, if it leaves you unmoved, then mind your own business, and leave those to grasp it and be moved by it to whom it is given of God!⁵⁴

Some will then say that even if the doctrine must be taught, perhaps it should be taught only to the mature saints, or at least only to believers, but certainly not mentioned in evangelism.

However, Jesus flatly tells his hearers, including the unbelievers, that no one can know the Father unless "the Son *chooses to reveal* him" (Matthew 11:27), that no one can come to him for salvation unless the Father "draws him" (John 6:44) and "has enabled him" (John 6:65). This means that it is fully legitimate to preach, even to unbelievers, "Although you will be saved only if you come to Christ and believe the gospel, unless God chooses and enables you, you cannot come and will not believe." In addition, Jesus says to the unbelievers, "You do not believe because you are not my sheep" (John 10:26). This means that it is fully appropriate to preach, even to unbelievers, "If you do not believe, it is because you are not one of God's people, but one of the reprobates, destined for destruction."

Would this not offend some hearers, and drive them away? Yes, preaching like this will offend *the reprobates* and drive them away, which will also mean that we will have fewer false converts in our churches, who cause us unnecessary and (because they are unregenerate) *unfixable* problems. But surely the elect would rejoice to hear about God's sovereign power and grace, revealed for his glory and for our salvation. As Paul writes, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (Romans 10:15). There he

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 90.

cites Isaiah 52:7, and the message in that verse is "*Your God reigns!*"⁵⁵ Thus the sovereign rule and grace of God is the message of the gospel.

This is what we find in the ministry of Christ, so that when he says, "I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him," many people "turned back and no longer followed him"; in contrast, Peter says, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:65-69). Therefore, because of the teaching of Scripture, the example of Christ, the doctrine of the apostles,⁵⁶ and even the preferable effect, both election and reprobation are suitable and desirable subjects in teaching and in evangelism.

The truth is that while many Calvinists are hesitant, the Arminians are boldly proclaiming their false gospel of free will, that the people must save themselves on the basis of what Christ has done, that God has taken the first step but now the final and decisive step is theirs to take, and that God can do nothing in their lives without their consent. In the first place, for us to neglect any part of the biblical system of truth is a great sin, especially such a foundational doctrine, and in the light of the Arminians' audacity, not to boldly preach predestination and sovereign grace in all contexts would be devastating, and has been devastating, to the church's strength and progress.

Some people treat this as a secondary issue, too trivial to bicker over; however, we have shown that the doctrine is not trivial, nor is it just a matter of preference or perspective. Rather, we are considering the very nature of God and the gospel. Is our God as the Bible reveals him – sovereign and almighty – or is he like the pagan mythological gods – limited and struggling? Is salvation really "from the Lord," or is it partly from God and partly from man?

Luther writes that the issue is "of eternal consequence."⁵⁷ He calls the topic "the real thing," "the essential issue," "the hinge on which all turns," and "the vital spot," compared to which other disputes are but "extraneous issues" and "trifles."⁵⁸ If you are a Christian, design your program for theological studies accordingly; if you are a pastor, set your agenda for preaching with this in mind. Luther and the Reformers understood the nature of the dispute and its implications, for without an absolutely sovereign God who does all things by his sovereign power and saves his people solely by his sovereign grace, there would be no Christianity. Therefore, let us not be ashamed of the gospel – the true and the whole gospel – that God saves his chosen ones by his grace, according to his will and his pleasure, and for his glory.

⁵⁵ The verse says, "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'"

⁵⁶ The apostles preached on divine sovereignty and predestination in their "evangelistic" sermons (Acts 2:23, 17:26), and surely they also taught it in the church (Acts 4:28). There was no controversy among them; they affirmed God's sovereignty over everything, including sin and salvation.

⁵⁷ Luther, p. 90.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

REDEMPTION

Although predestination pervades the entire passage under discussion (1:3-14), and although Christ's agency and headship also appear throughout, we have noted what appears to be a progression in emphasis from the Father's work in predestination, to the Son's work in redemption, and then to the Spirit's work in application. However, Paul seemingly does not intend to create rigidly defined sections in this passage, but rather to compose a theologically and devotionally rich doxology that blends all these ideas together. At any rate, we now come to the Son's work in redemption (v. 7).

Redemption refers to deliverance by ransom. Barclay adds the theologically significant point that "In every case the conception is the delivering of a man from a situation from which he was powerless to liberate himself or from a penalty which he himself could never have paid."⁵⁹ Because sinful man is wholly depraved, he needs more than a little help from God. Even if God were to give him a little grace, it would not benefit him at all; rather, salvation must be all of grace.

The way that Christ performed the work of redemption was "through his blood." The idea of blood atonement is crucial in understanding salvation. Christ did not die on the cross as a mere moral example or as a random martyr, nor is the main significance of atonement in the *liquid* that came out of his body. Instead, the expression refers to Christ, as the federal head of the elect, offering up himself as a perfect sacrifice to render complete satisfaction toward divine justice, which otherwise would have required the everlasting punishment against all sinners.

Because this is what the expression means, Hendriksen translates it as, "deliverance as a result of the payment of a ransom,"⁶⁰ adding that "He gave his blood," "He gave his soul," and "He gave himself" are equivalent in meaning.⁶¹ Similarly, Barclay translates, "a deliverance which cost his life."⁶² They are right to a large extent, and these translations or paraphrases would help correct some of the false doctrines and mystical interpretations taught by a number of heretics and theologically ignorant preachers.

On the other hand, "translating" the expression in a way that removes mention of the blood altogether removes something essential out of the text, namely, the clear allusion of Christ's sacrifice as the fulfillment of the Old Testament blood sacrifices. As Leviticus says, "It is the blood that makes atonement for one's life" (17:11); however, "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4), and thus the Old Testament sacrifices symbolized and anticipated the only sacrifice that could actually "take away sins," that is, the sacrifice of Christ.⁶³

For this reason, in trying to translate the "meaning" of the expression instead of the words, those translations have also changed the actual meaning of the verse. As with

⁵⁹ Barclay, p. 81.

⁶⁰ Hendriksen, p. 69.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁶² Barclay, p. 81.

⁶³ See also Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 1 Peter 1:18-19; Revelation 5:9.

other problems of biblical interpretation, the best solution is probably not to translate the meaning instead of the words, but to educate the believers and refute the heretics. As for preachers, rather than dreaming up mystical theories, they should wake up and read some good commentaries.

Misunderstandings of this expression have given rise to a number of perverse doctrines and grotesque practices. For example, many Pentecostals and Charismatics advocate "pleading the blood." The teaching suggests that in the face of demonic powers and at times of desperation, one may verbally call upon the blood of Jesus for deliverance. By this they do not refer merely to the sacrificial death of Christ by which he has purchased our salvation and blessings, but it often seems that they appeal to the shed blood itself – that is, the liquid – as if it has some mystical power in the spiritual realm to exorcise evil spirits and to confer upon the petitioner the needed blessings.

Perhaps this is not as outrageous as the Catholic superstition of "holy water," since at least they are appealing to the blood of Christ, and at least they have some basis in fact, however distorted. Nevertheless, since Scripture never teaches this practice, and since it is in fact based upon a laughable distortion of the biblical expression, "pleading the blood" should neither be taught nor practiced.

Rather than inventing silly superstitions, we should study what Paul actually says in this letter about overcoming the "powers" and inheriting the blessings. Paul's approach toward the "powers" is the very opposite of the magical or mystical view. He writes to an area where there was much concern and superstition about magical forces and demonic powers. Instead of teaching them "Christian" formulas of exorcism and "Christian" magical chants, and instead of sending them crucifixes and amulets, he writes them a letter of high theology, teaching them that Christians overcome all demonic powers in our subjective experience by intellectually understanding the objective work of God in predestination, the work of Christ in redemption, and the present reign of Christ in exaltation.

So we even "exorcise" by theology. The anti-intellectuals believe that theology is boring and powerless, and indeed this is true of *their* theology and that of our opposers. But Pauline theology – that is, *Christian* theology, in which God is sovereign and Christ is exalted – has "divine power to demolish strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:4). Paul will emphasize the intellect (and its relation to divine power) several more times in the rest of this letter.

Hebrews 9:22 says, "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness," but because of the perfect atonement of Christ, we now have the "forgiveness of sins" (Ephesians 1:7). Since salvation from sin requires a perfect blood atonement, since God has chosen only Jesus Christ to make such an atonement, and subsequently, since only Christ has made such an atonement, this means that salvation from sin is found only in Christ, and that there is no salvation elsewhere. That there is no salvation elsewhere means that the full wrath of God shall descend, and even now rests upon, all non-Christians. It means that not only will atheists and agnostics be condemned to hell forever, but also *all* non-

Christians – Mormons, Muslims, Buddhists, Catholics, and so on – and this includes all who profess a false gospel (Galatians 1:8-9).

Another implication of the necessity and the actuality of the blood atonement is that, since the atonement of Christ is an *actual* atonement (not just a potential atonement), and since it rendered *complete* satisfaction toward divine justice (not just partial satisfaction), this means that for those whom Christ made atonement, he made a perfect, complete, and final atonement for *all* their sins, which means that there remains no sin for which God will condemn them. This in turn means that *every* individual for whom Christ died shall be saved.

However, this does not tell us for whom Christ made atonement – we just know that all those for whom Christ made atonement will be saved. But then, since Scripture explicitly and repeatedly teaches that not everyone will be saved, this necessarily means that Christ did not die for every person. Again, if Christ made atonement for *all* your sins, then there is nothing left for which God will condemn you, which means that you will necessarily be saved. And if Christ made such an atonement for everyone, then this means that everyone will be saved; however, since Scripture says that not everyone will be saved, this necessarily means that Christ did not make atonement for everyone.

Instead, Scripture teaches that Christ died only for his church, his people, his sheep. Taught by necessarily implication and explicit mention in Scripture, this is the biblical doctrine of effective particular atonement. In other words, God had a specific design in redemption, and Christ was the agent by whom God carried out the design.

Of course, many people detest this biblical doctrine, perhaps even more than others. Against scriptural teaching, they insist that Christ made a universal atonement, that he died for every person who would exist in human history. However, this view necessarily entails either an imperfect atonement or universal salvation. But since Scripture affirms a perfect atonement and denies universal salvation, this means that universal atonement is necessarily false.

One objection may be that, even if Christ made a perfect atonement for our sins, we must have faith in what he has done in order to receive the benefits of this atonement. But what is faith, and how does it come? This objection seems to assume that, although we cannot make atonement for our own sins, in our sinful state we can still manufacture faith by our "free will." That is, while spiritually dead and depraved, we can still freely make the most important positive spiritual decision in our lives. This is irrational, unbiblical, and heretical.

We have already refuted free will, and in our spiritually dead condition, it is impossible to have the positive spiritual disposition required to have faith in Christ. Also, the objection assumes that Christ did not atone for the sin of unbelief, or a lack of faith; therefore, the objection does not apply to a perfect atonement, in which Christ made atonement for *all* the sins of the elect. But since Scripture indeed teaches a perfect atonement, the objection does not apply.

In addition, Scripture never teaches that faith is something that we must conjure up by ourselves in order to obtain God's blessings; rather, it depicts faith as precisely one of those blessings obtained by Christ's redemptive work for those whom he redeemed. In other words, you do not benefit from the atonement because you have faith; rather, you have faith because it is a benefit of the atonement. That is, faith is not something by which *you obtain* the benefits of the atonement, but faith is something by which *God applies* the benefits of the atonement to you. Moreover, faith itself is "a gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8) in the first place; it is something that God gives you, and not something that you just decide to produce.

So we again affirm with Scripture, that salvation is really and wholly from God, from start to finish (Hebrews 12:2). Biblical faith is not something that comes by our own decision or by our own power, but it is a "faith that comes through him" (Acts 3:16). Luther writes that faith is "a special and rare gift of God."⁶⁴ Therefore, we unyieldingly affirm that Christ's blood atonement is perfect, complete, final, actual, effective, and particular, and that faith itself is a gift that he obtained for us by his sacrifice, so that there is no room for boasting, except in what Christ has done.⁶⁵

When Scripture teaches that Christ's atonement completely satisfied God's justice, it does not imply nor should we infer that there was a disagreement in the Godhead. That is, it is not as if God the Father is a God of wrath, so that he is concerned only with exacting vengeance on those who have transgressed his holy laws, and that God the Son is a God of grace, so that he is concerned only with redeeming sinners. This would be a ludicrous and unwarranted inference from the necessity and the actuality of the blood atonement.

Contrary to this false understanding, Paul states that it is God who has chosen us to be saved, and that it is "in accordance with the riches of God's grace" that he sent Christ to make this perfect atonement for us. Therefore, there is no disagreement among the members of the Godhead, nor does justice contradict grace in the plan of God. Rather, it is because of God's grace that he made a way to satisfy his own justice,⁶⁶ so that he could be *both* "just and the justifier" (Romans 3:26, NASB) of those whom he has chosen for salvation in Christ. And therefore, we affirm that justice and grace are in perfect harmony, and the Father and the Son are in perfect agreement.

Hebrews 9:15 aptly summarizes what we have said about the atonement: "For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance – now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant."

Christ is the "mediator" between God and man, so that only through him can man know God and be saved. He is the agent through whom God performs his foreordained plan and

⁶⁴ Luther, p. 155.

⁶⁵ For more on the biblical doctrine of effective particular atonement, see my *Systematic Theology*.

⁶⁶ In saving sinners, God did not annul, disregard, or contradict his own justice; rather, he *satisfied* it through the atonement of Christ.

redeems his chosen ones, and he is the federal head in whom all the chosen ones are saved. Outside of Christ, there is only darkness and death. Only Christianity leads to heaven; all non-Christian religions and philosophies lead to hell.

Christ is the mediator of the "new covenant." He is the fulfillment of all the expectations and anticipations, and all the types and shadows of the previous administration of God's grace, that is, "the first covenant." The blood sacrifices of the past were really types of the one perfect sacrifice that God himself would provide for his people, and Christ's sacrifice was the complete fulfillment.

Christ "died as a ransom," not as a mere moral example or a random martyr. He died not just to inspire others to do something, but *he* did something, namely, to render complete satisfaction to divine justice and redeem the chosen ones. Because he died as an actual ransom, his death did not obtain the mere possibility of salvation for the elect, but it *accomplished* salvation for the elect. He did not just *start* to save his people, but he *did* it. He did not just take the first step, but he did all that was required to save his people. The rest, even the faith of the elect, is the *application* of what Christ has done.

Christ died for his people to "set them free from the sins committed." Atonement is for forgiveness, and actual atonement guarantees actual forgiveness. That is, an actual and perfect atonement does not provide a mere possibility of forgiveness, but the reality of forgiveness. Therefore, all those for whom Christ died shall be saved. There is no chance that even one of those for whom he died will be lost.

Christ died, not to save everyone, but only "those who are called." Although the actual and perfect atonement of Christ guarantees the actual forgiveness of all those for whom he died, it does not imply universal salvation, since he did not die for everyone, but only for those whom God had chosen. If God has chosen you and given you faith in Christ, then it is only appropriate that you serve him and obey him with fear and trembling. You better not dare think or suggest that you had the good sense or moral clarity to choose Christ, as if God did not sovereignly and irresistibly cause you to so choose. Arminianism represents the height of impiety and the essence of false religion.

Christ died to save us from our sins, and those who are called will "receive the promised eternal inheritance." Paul writes, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him – but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:9-10). The inheritance that awaits us, and indeed what we have already received, is so great and precious that, if God had not revealed it, we would never have been able to even conceive it. But for the unbeliever, death is his destiny, and hellfire is his inheritance. "Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness" (Romans 11:22, NASB).

ILLUMINATION

In eternity, God immutably selected those whom he would save; in time, Christ perfectly satisfied divine justice on behalf of these chosen ones; then, throughout history (even before Christ came, but anticipating his coming), the Spirit applies the blessings

foreordained by God and obtained by Christ to the chosen ones through (giving them and energizing their) faith in Christ.

One foundational blessing coming from divine grace that the Spirit applies to the elect is intellectual – it is the gift of "all wisdom and understanding" (1:8).

The word translated "wisdom" is *sophia*. It has a rich background in Greek thought, and stresses acuity and insight in the philosophical, theoretical, and academic. In our context, since Paul is referring to what God gives us by revelation and impartation, we may take it to designate acuity, insight, knowledge, and intelligence regarding the theological and doctrinal. Of course, this is only to note how the specific context informs the understanding of this word – it remains under the broad meaning of *sophia*. It is by our biblical wisdom and theological insight that we answer the philosophical questions. God has made us master philosophers by his grace.

The word translated "understanding" is *phronēsis*, and is elsewhere translated "insight," "prudence," and "sound sense." Although the two words are not always consistently and precisely distinguished, here it seems correct to maintain a difference, so that whereas "wisdom" stresses the philosophical (or in a biblical context, the theological), "prudence" emphasizes practical wisdom, that is, insight concerning the right use of means to attain the desired ends, and that leads to right action. So the first word stresses the theological, and the second stresses the practical.⁶⁷

Barclay writes, "It is Paul's claim that Jesus brought us *sophia*, the intellectual knowledge which satisfies the mind, and *phronēsis*, the practical knowledge which enables us to handle the day to day problems of practical life and living."⁶⁸ In other words, God has made us both philosophically and practically competent; Christians are those who know how to think and how to live. Max Turner notes that this wisdom and prudence are "at the heart of our walk with God."⁶⁹ Therefore, "Christian" anti-intellectuals and irrationalists have taken an anti-biblical position.

Paul teaches that this wisdom and prudence comes from God's grace, which he "lavished" on us (v. 8). The word refers to a superabundance, an excessive amount, and an overflowing measure. Thus Paul is speaking of "an oversized grace,"⁷⁰ out of which God confers upon us *all* wisdom and prudence – *all* philosophical, theological, theoretical, ethical, and practical knowledge. This does not imply that God has given us

⁶⁷ There is some confusion on whether the words should apply to God, so that it is he would *exercises* wisdom and prudence, or whether the words refer to something that God *gives* us. With good reasons, many commentators agree with us that Paul is referring to the latter. For the sake of brevity, we will not discuss this point in depth except to note that the context lends itself to this understanding, and that the parallel verse in Colossians 1:9 is clear that Paul is referring to something that God gives us: "...asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through *all spiritual wisdom and understanding*."

⁶⁸ Barclay, p. 83.

⁶⁹ Max Turner, "Ephesians," in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*; InterVarsity Press, 1994; p. 1226.

⁷⁰ Kenneth S. Wuest, *Ephesians and Colossians*; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953; p. 42.

omniscience⁷¹ – the emphasis is perhaps on *every kind* of wisdom – but at least it means that what God has given is comprehensive, and more than sufficient.

What treachery it is, then, to say that biblical revelation alone is insufficient as a comprehensive intellectual foundation! And what blasphemy it is to say that biblical revelation alone is insufficient to address every practical need! God's revelation to us is sufficient – more than sufficient – to sustain a complete worldview, as well as to provide definitive guidance for making wise and moral decisions.

Yet we often hear professing believers glibly say, "The Bible doesn't address this," and then continue to consider their problems as if this assumption is true. They are very quick to assume that biblical revelation is insufficient, but very slow to admit that they are just stupid and lazy.

Instead, their attitude should be as follows: "Since Scripture claims to be sufficient to make me *'thoroughly* equipped for *every* good work' (2 Timothy 3:17), then since I have this problem or this decision to make, this means that the Bible must have an adequate answer. Thus the problem is never in the Bible, but in my ignorance of what it teaches and implies, and also in my laziness for not spending more time in trying to find out. If there is indeed something that the Bible does not address, then it means that I do not need to know it in order to have a comprehensive worldview, or to make wise and moral decisions. In other words, the Bible contains all the information necessary for me to be a good and growing Christian in every sense and in every way. Even though I do not live up to all that it teaches, all the information that I need is indeed in there, and it is my duty and delight to study and obey it."

There is hope for those who will think this way. Scripture itself promises, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). On the other hand, many people set up their own ignorance as God's judge: "If I don't know about it, that means God never said anything about it!" This way of thinking is irrational, unbiblical, and sinful.

It is doubly shameful, therefore, for professing believers to seek answers to the ultimate questions from scientists and philosophers, as if they know anything, and to seek instructions on even ordinary matters from psychologists, self-improvement experts, or even various gurus and fortune-tellers. Are not these professing believers spineless and worthless? Or are they really unbelievers, who are as dogs returning to their vomit, and pigs returning to the mud (2 Peter 2:22)? At any rate, we can say for sure that they have little knowledge of and respect for Scripture.

Now, Paul teaches that God's revelation to us covers all that is needed for human thought and conduct, and all that is needed for salvation and holiness. Christianity addresses both the philosophical and the practical. On this basis (that the biblical worldview addresses both the philosophical and the practical), Foulkes writes, "If this is correct, it follows that

⁷¹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians*; Hendrickson Publishers, 2001; p. 368.

the wisdom of God is not merely intellectual or academic...it is also the source of understanding in the details of daily living."⁷² He is technically correct, and many others also make this point; however, what they often seem to forget is that this also works the other way. That is, Paul just as surely shows that the wisdom of God is not merely "the source of understanding in the details of daily living," but that it is also "intellectual or academic." If biblical wisdom is not only philosophical but also practical, then it is not only practical but also philosophical. And if there are indeed some who stress the intellectual too much, as if this is possible, there seems to be many more who do not stress it enough.

Another point that many writers fail to grasp is that it is in fact misleading to "balance" the intellectual with the practical, or the practical with the intellectual. In this verse, *both* "wisdom" and "prudence" are by definition given *to the mind*. It is not as if "wisdom" is given to your mind, and "prudence" is given to your toes! In this sense, both wisdom and prudence are "intellectual." The difference is not that one is intellectual and the other one is non-intellectual, but that they refer to intellectual wisdom *about* different things. Therefore, God's gift of "wisdom and prudence" refers to a comprehensive revelation and impartation of intellectual wisdom, granting us more than sufficient information regarding all philosophical issues and practical things. In light of this, let us destroy all traces of anti-intellectualism and irrationalism in our thinking. An anti-intellectual Christianity is anti-Christianity.⁷³

REVELATION

Now, all those who are saved under both the old and the new administrations of God's grace are saved on the same basis, namely, through a God-given faith in the redemptive work of Christ. Nevertheless, under the new administration, there is a fuller revelation of "the mystery of his will" (v. 9). The revelation of this "mystery" corresponds to God's gift of "wisdom and prudence." In other words, when Scripture says that God gives his people "wisdom and prudence," it is not just saying that God gives us intellectual potential and capabilities (although these are included), but it is also saying that God reveals to us actual information for us to understand and apply.

The word "mystery" is a favorite of the anti-intellectuals, and they constantly misuse and abuse it. When they use the word, they are referring to something that we do not or even cannot understand, and therefore sometimes they make the additional point that it is not something that we should think too much about, and certainly not debate about. Anti-intellectuals often use the word as an escape for something that they cannot refute but at the same time refuse to accept. But Christians should not be like the atheists, who are intellectually dishonest and incompetent.

⁷² Foulkes, p. 59.

⁷³ Some scholars insist that "wisdom" in Scripture is mainly practical (and moral), but the basis for their assertion consists of their anti-intellectualistic assumptions and prejudices more than faithful and honest biblical exegesis. Their view is obviously false in the light of this and many other biblical verses, showing that biblical wisdom is *both* philosophical and practical, not just practical.

For example, sometimes after explaining the doctrine of predestination to someone, and after answering all of his questions and objections, he would still sigh and say, "Well, I guess it's just a mystery," in the sense that the doctrine is something that we cannot understand after all. But I just finished explaining it to him, answered all his questions and objections, until he could find nothing biblically or logically wrong with it! It is not that the doctrine could not be understood, but that he refused to accept it, and that was one way he thought he could escape. If God has revealed a doctrine in Scripture, then to call it a "mystery" (in the sense of something *still* hidden), as if he has never revealed it, would be to insult and defy him. Therefore, we should never fail to challenge a false and illegitimate appeal to "mystery," especially when it is done to mask one's unbelief and defiance.

If something is clearly revealed and explained, then it is certainly not a "mystery" in the sense that it is still hidden or that it cannot be understood. Indeed, when it comes to this word, there is a confusion between the common usage and the biblical usage.

In common usage, the word often refers to something that we cannot understand, but in biblical usage, and even in the context of our passage, it is obvious that the word is used in a different way. Paul has just said that God gives us "wisdom and prudence," and writes that "he *made known* to us the mystery of his will" (v. 8). In other words, a "mystery" is not something that humans cannot understand, even if it is something hidden at a given time. Here Paul is referring to something that *was* hidden, but that has now been "made known." Instead of referring to something that we do not know or cannot understand, the biblical usage of "mystery" refers to almost the opposite – indeed to something that probably *was* hidden, but now has been revealed and explained.⁷⁴

Therefore, O'Brien calls this mystery an "open secret."⁷⁵ Markus Barth is more elaborate, and writes:

But the one *mystērion* of God, even the "secret" of God, is for Paul far from unknowable. It is known by revelation and is to be made known all over the world. Certainly he has the highest respect for the revelation and gospel entrusted to him – but it is respect caused by knowledge rather than by ignorance and incompetence....The "secret" of which he speaks can therefore not be identified with a mystery wholly or partly, always or temporarily, actually or intentionally shrouded in a cloud bank. He does not engage in paradoxical logic or glossolalia. Plain, frank, sober, courageous talk, though tinted with characteristics of the diction of prayer, is the way he speaks of God's secret. In short, when he speaks of one

⁷⁴ In another context, Luther writes, "Does not Paul acknowledge it to be wisdom hidden in a mystery, foretold indeed by the prophets but revealed only by the gospel, so that it was from eternity secret and unknown to the world (cf. 1 Cor. 2:7)?" (Luther, p. 306). Thus to Luther, a "mystery" means something foretold by the prophets, but revealed by the gospel, as we also affirm here. See also Romans 16:25-26; 1 Corinthians 2:7-10; Ephesians 3:2-6, 6:19; Colossians 1:25-27, 2:2-3, 4:3.

⁷⁵ O'Brien, p. 109.

mystērion, then he means a mystery that is revealed; all he has to say is based on the manifestation of the formerly hidden.⁷⁶

The biblical usage of "mystery" is indeed meaningful and instructive, but it leaves no room for anti-intellectualism, and gives no excuse for withholding assent or obedience. Appealing to "mystery" (as something still hidden) may sound pious and reverent to some, as if one is struck by the depth and the wonder of divine wisdom; however, when such an appeal is made in the face of clear revelation, it simply betrays one's laziness and defiance. If God has revealed something, then we should study it, and we should believe it.⁷⁷

RECONCILIATION

What, then, is this mystery? What is the content of this "secret," that was once hidden, but now has been revealed? Although Paul elaborates on it later in the letter, the immediate context also gives us some clear indications.

First, whatever this "mystery" concerning "his will" is about, it is entirely founded on God's absolute sovereignty, and performed by agency of the Son. Paul writes that it is "according to his good pleasure" (v. 9), which "he purposed in Christ" (v. 9), and to be executed at his designated time (v. 10).

Then, Paul states that the mystery of his will is "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (v. 10). The word translated "to bring...together" or "summing up" (NASB) designates, in mathematics, the practice of adding up a column of figures and placing the sum at the top, and in rhetoric, it refers to the conclusion of a speech or argument. Therefore, broadly speaking, God's "secret" plan is to "sum up" "all things in heaven and on earth" under Christ.⁷⁸

God is summing up "all things in heaven and on earth" under Christ. In the general sense, this is not restricted to salvation or believers, but it literally refers to "all things." Paul is first referring to a cosmic unity; however, this does not imply that all things will be peaceably reconciled to God in Christ. Rather, Paul seems to have in mind the same thing that he speaks of in Philippians 2:9-11 – namely, that God has exalted Christ to the highest place, so that all will "confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father," although many will doubtless do this by compulsion and not by sincere faith. In this sense, when Paul says that God is bringing together "all things" under Christ, he also includes all the things that will never be peaceably reconciled to God, such as Satan, his angels, and the reprobates.

In other words, God will put everything in its proper place by clearly defining and exhibiting its relation to Christ. This by no means imply that everyone will be saved,

⁷⁶ Markus Barth, *Ephesians 1-3* (The Anchor Bible, Vol. 34); Doubleday, 1974; p. 126.

⁷⁷ The biblical usage of "mystery" also implies the necessity of special revelation – it is something that would remain hidden unless and until God reveals it to us, and now he has indeed revealed it.

⁷⁸ I say "broadly speaking" because after this Paul immediately brings up a specific application of this idea (v. 11-12).

since not every relationship with Christ is a saving relationship. However, since Christ himself said, "He who is not with me is against me" (Matthew 12:30), every person has either a positive or a negative relationship with him. It is impossible to have absolutely no relationship with Christ; no one is neutral – one is either his friend or his enemy.

Since God is the one who sovereignty directs all of history by his providence, and since this teaching (that he will sum up all things in Christ) states the purpose toward which God directs all of history by his providence, this teaching is therefore also the necessary principle by which anyone can have an accurate understanding of history, or historical events, persons, and periods.

That is, since God directs all of history – every detail of it – with the intent to sum up all things in Christ, this means that the only way to have an accurate view of any historical event, person, or period is to adopt this principle as the presupposition of historical understanding and interpretation. This applies to even the seemingly least significant decisions and occurrences.

This in turn means that non-Christians cannot be good historians. No matter how skilled and knowledgeable they consider themselves to be, unless they first presuppose the sovereignty of God and the primacy of Christ, they are incompetent, inaccurate, and incomplete in their historical interpretations. Since all of history follows God's foreordained plan, to exclude or ignore Christ in one's historical investigations is also to preclude any possibility for proper understanding. "Christ" (including all the wisdom and knowledge hidden in him, revealed to us in Scripture) must be our intellectual starting point, even in the study of history.

There is a more specific sense in which God is summing up all things in Christ, and that is the soteriological sense, in which we are referring to how God brings together all of his *chosen ones* under Christ. Immediately after stating that God will "bring all things" together under Christ, Paul continues:

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit... (Ephesians 1:11-13)

In these verses, Paul makes a distinction between Jews and non-Jews (or Gentiles).⁷⁹ However, he does not make this distinction to emphasize the distinction; rather, he makes it so that he may point out how the two groups have now been united, namely, by the foreordination of God, the atonement of Christ, and the work of the Spirit.

⁷⁹ See also Ephesians 2:11-13, 3:1-6, and 4:17.

The unity between the two groups in Christ is entirely founded on God's immutable and predetermined plan. It was God who decided that he would *choose* for salvation both Jews and non-Jews, or rather, it was God who decided that he would *create* some of those whom he has conceived and chosen in his mind in eternity as Jews, and some as Gentiles. The Jews and Gentiles did not create themselves (or by someone else) to be presented to God for his choosing; rather, God created some of his elect to be Jews, and created others to be Gentiles, but both are elect in Christ.

To paraphrase the apostle, "The mystery of his will is that he will sum up all things under Christ. When it comes to his people, he has predestined some of us Jews to first believe in Christ, but he has predestined some of you Gentiles to also believe in Christ and be saved. By giving us faith in the same gospel, God has placed you Gentile believers 'in Christ' in the same way that he has for us Jewish believers."⁸⁰ That this is clearly what Paul has in mind is seen later in the letter, where he writes:

Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the *mystery made known* to me by revelation, as I have *already written briefly*. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand *my insight into the mystery* of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as *it has now been revealed* by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 3:2-6)

Note especially verse 6 in which he explicitly explains what "mystery" he is talking about: "This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus." By faith in the gospel, the Gentile Christians have become "heirs together," "members together," and "sharers together" with the Jewish Christians in Christ. As Paul writes elsewhere, "For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'" (Romans 10:12-13).

If the general sense of "the mystery of his will" is the unity of the *cosmos* under Christ (in the sense that even the hostile forces are put in their proper places), then the specific sense of the mystery is the unity of the *elect* under Christ (in the sense that Jews and Gentiles have become one in him, sharing the same status).

If this is not difficult to understand, for some of us the more difficult question will be why this is a "mystery" at all. It appears neither complex nor surprising to many or even

⁸⁰ It is impossible to properly understand Ephesians without fully acknowledging that God exercises total and direct control over everything, from the most general directions to the most specific details in all of history, including even something seemingly insignificant like the death of a sparrow (Matthew 10:29).

most of us. The answer corresponds to the very nature of divine "mystery," that it is something that *was hidden*, but *now revealed*. As R. B. Kuiper writes:

...salvation is for gentiles as well as Jews. For us who live in the twentieth century after Christ it is difficult, if not impossible, to grasp the novelty of that truth for the Jews of the first century of the Christian era. It impressed them as being exceedingly radical. So deeply was the fact that God showed His word unto Jacob, His statutes and His judgments unto Israel, and that He dealt thus with no other nation (Ps. 147:19f.) ingrained into the very fibre of the Jewish soul, that it rebelled violently against the notion that the middle wall of partition between Jew and gentile had been broken down and that peace was to be preached to them that were afar off as well as to them that were nigh (Eph. 2:14, 17).

The Jews of that day were almost totally blind to what appears to us to be, and really is, the plain and emphatic teaching of the Old Testament: that the national church would one day blossom forth into a universal church. In spite of the fact that the Master had on numerous occasions commanded the disciples to be His witnesses to the utmost parts of the earth, it required a vision and a voice from heaven to convince the apostle Peter of the propriety of preaching the gospel to a Roman...⁸¹

Therefore, the reason that many of us may not regard this doctrine as a mystery is precisely because it has now been revealed, so that many of us already know it (or think that we know it) and assume it in our thinking.

Nevertheless, this doctrine is still as necessary and relevant as ever. Although we think that we know it, many professing Christians have, perhaps unintentionally, ignored or even denied it in their thinking. I am referring to unbiblical dispensational teachings that insist that God even now regards the Jewish people as especially chosen and superior to the Gentiles. To affirm this in any sense and to any degree is to reject the very "mystery" that has now been revealed for so many centuries, and that we supposedly know so well.

If the mystery of his will is that Gentiles are also equal heirs in Christ, then it is just as certain that Jews are not at all superior to Gentiles in Christ, and those Jews that do not believe are not in Christ at all, and certainly not superior to anybody. Non-Christian Jews

⁸¹ R. B. Kuiper, *For Whom Did Christ Die?*; Wipf and Stock Publishers; p. 31. Note that, as Kuiper acknowledges, a "mystery" is not necessarily something that has been completely hidden, but what is now revealed in fact has been "the plain and emphatic teaching of the Old Testament" all along. Therefore, we say that a mystery in Scripture is something that is foretold (or sometimes at least hinted at) by the prophets and that is now fully revealed by Christ and the apostles. The salvation of the Gentiles is founded on God's promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:3).

are doomed to hell just as much as the most vile and wicked non-Christian Gentiles. "There is no difference" (Romans 3:22, 10:12).⁸²

When God announced by Christ, "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit" (Matthew 21:43), he was not making an empty threat – he did it! The church now mainly consists of Gentiles, not Jews. The Jews have no special or exclusive rights in the kingdom; rather, they must enter just like everyone else, that is, through faith in Christ. And they are to receive no special treatment and given no special respect in the church (Galatians 3:28).⁸³ This point is very simple, and basic to the biblical gospel; nevertheless, many dispensationalists miss it or even reject it.

CERTIFICATION

According to God's foreordination, he would save the Jewish elect and the Gentile elect in the same way – by giving them faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. As Paul writes elsewhere, "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you'" (Galatians 3:8). Although the Jews were chronologically "the first to hope in Christ" (Ephesians 1:12) the Gentiles "also were included in Christ" by hearing and believing the gospel (v. 13).

Then, Paul says, "Having believed, you were *marked in him with a seal*, the promised Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 1:13). In the ancient world, a seal was often applied to a letter, a legal document, a piece of property, or an important shipment in order to protect it, and to serve as a proof of ownership or authenticity. A sealed letter or shipment was meant to be opened only by the designated recipient, and depending on the person whose seal marked the item, to illegally break a seal could result in grave consequences.

Scripture teaches that when we believed the gospel, God sealed us with his Holy Spirit. By doing so, he officially declares that he owns and protects us, and that we are not to be tempered with by anyone else. And we also have been sealed for a purpose, and that by the seal of God. As Paul writes later in the letter, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed *for the day of redemption*" (4:30). Therefore, the seal of God upon us implies that, by his divine authority and power, he has decreed that we will remain in the state of faith and grace, and that we will reach the completion of our redemption.

⁸² Is there a place for Jewish outreach, then? Yes, but not because they are *Jews*, but because they are *sinners*, just like everyone else.

⁸³ Of course I *do not* say that they should be given *worse* treatment or *less* respect than others, but only that they are not to be considered superior in any sense *just because* they are Jews. Note that Romans 3:1-2 refers to an advantage that the Jews had in history, because they had the Scripture. However, they no longer have even this advantage, because the Gentiles now also have the Scripture; moreover, the Gentile Christians rightly embrace the New Testament, which enables them to understand the Old even better than the Jews. Any person or any group that affirms anything less than the entire Scripture is at a severe *disadvantage*, to put it mildly. Now, if a Jewish person were to repent and believe the gospel, then he would become *equal* to a non-Jewish believer, but by no means superior. The point is that race is spiritually irrelevant.

Indeed, the Holy Spirit by whom God has sealed us, "is a deposit *guaranteeing* our inheritance" (v. 14). A "deposit" refers to a down payment or first installment provided by the buyer to signify his intention to complete the purchase and to reserve the item so that it becomes unavailable to any other party.

In today's commercial world, it is possible to forfeit one's deposit if he no longer desires the item or if he cannot produce the rest of the money; however, it seems that at that time, the "deposit" refers to a partial payment or a pledge *guaranteeing* that the full payment would follow. In any case, Paul's use of "deposit" certainly indicates much more than a mere *gesture* of God's intention, because he explicitly states that it is a *guarantee* that God will complete what he has started in us. Paul repeats this in one of his letters to the Corinthians, saying, "He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, *guaranteeing* what is to come" (2 Corinthians 1:21-22) and "Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, *guaranteeing* what is to come" (5:5).

Therefore, Paul teaches that once a person truly becomes a Christian, there is no possibility of him truly becoming a non-Christian again; once God gives a person true faith in Christ, there is no possibility that he will lose this faith (John 10:29). Although true Christians often stumble, and sometimes even into great sins, it is impossible for them to be truly and finally lost (Luke 22:32). If a person truly and finally denounces the faith, then it can only mean that he has never been a true Christian in the first place, no matter how much he appeared to be one to others. As John writes, "They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us" (1 John 2:19).

This does not imply that once you have become a Christian, then you may constantly and deliberately sin without any regard for God's laws and precepts and still regard yourself a Christian, for if you really are a Christian, then you will not think this way. Because a true Christian is one who has been inwardly changed by God, he will not truly and finally adopt a licentious lifestyle. Also, a true Christian who has temporarily stumbled into a sinful way of living will lack assurance of salvation. Although he is still saved, he cannot be certain of it, and this lack of assurance is often one of the means by which God uses to restore the believer who has stumbled. The normal and healthy course for a Christian is to diligently seek assurance of his salvation through pursuing knowledge and holiness (2 Peter 1:10).

Some people call this teaching the doctrine of "eternal security," but I prefer "the preservation of believers" or "the preservation of the saints." Then, some call this "the perseverance of the saints," which is not wrong, for true Christians indeed persevere in their faith. Nevertheless, we must remember that *we persevere* in faith only because God *preserves* us by his power. As Paul writes in the same context where he mentions God's seal and deposit, "Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ" (2 Corinthians 1:21; also see 1 Peter 1:3-5).

In connection with the "deposit," Paul calls us "God's possession" (v. 14). This seems to be an allusion to how God addresses Israel in the Old Testament. For example, God says in Exodus 19:5-6, "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be *my treasured possession*. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me *a kingdom of priests* and *a holy nation*." Peter takes up the same expressions used here and applies them to the church: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession" (1 Peter 2:9, NASB). And he clearly has Gentile believers in mind when he writes this: "Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (v. 10; see Romans 9:23-26).

In other words, Gentile Christians are just as much "God's people" as the Jews were, and now if a Jew wishes to become one of God's people, he must also believe in Christ. Just because he is a Jew means *nothing*, "For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham" (Luke 3:8). It is time not only for Jews to learn this, but also for non-Jews, even professing Christians, to learn this. "The Lord knows those who are his" (2 Timothy 2:19) – if God has truly given us faith in Christ, then we are among his chosen ones; if we are among his chosen ones, then we are his special possession; and if we are his special possession, then he has given us his *guarantee* that he will jealously protect and preserve us to the day of redemption by his omnipotence.

CONCLUSION

Only when we ascribe the power and the initiative to God in every aspect and every stage of our salvation can we be consistent with the repeatedly stated purpose of God's foreordained plan, namely, that God does all these things "to the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:14; also v. 6 and 12). Arminianism greatly misrepresents both the content and the execution of God's plan, and robs God of his praise and glory. Thus Paul's theological doxology (v. 3-14) opposes Arminianism in all its forms.

God is one "who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (v. 11), and not one who requests man's permission and opinion, as if man can permit or opine anything without God's direct control in the first place. Because there is such a thing as divine sovereignty, there is no such thing as human free will – "only an insane person could believe both of these."⁸⁴ Of course Arminians are insane, or at least they sound like it. In any case, what really happens is that they affirm human free will, and they lie when they affirm divine sovereignty. And as we have seen above, *inconsistent* Calvinists sound quite foolish as well.

Paul's doxology begins this letter and contains all the main themes of the letter. At the same time, the content of the doxology itself is founded on the doctrine of predestination, and therefore predestination is the foundation of the entire letter.⁸⁵ And since Paul makes

⁸⁴ Gordon H. Clark, *Today's Evangelism*; The Trinity Foundation, 1990; p. 58.

⁸⁵ One implication is that if a commentary begins its exposition of Ephesians by affirming Arminianism (and / or dispensationalism), then it entirely misses the main thrust of the apostle's thinking. If it fails to grasp the very foundation of the letter, then it has no hope of accurately explaining the rest of it. Although

the doctrine of predestination the foundation of his letter, we have accordingly made it the foundation of this exposition of the letter. Predestination is the foundation of Christian salvation and expectation; it is the almighty God who sovereignly foreordained all things in eternity and who then executes his decrees in time and in history.

The rest of this letter discusses how God has been carrying out his sovereign decrees, and our proper response as believers. In any case, since we have established the all-important theological groundwork of predestination, and since we have already touched on the main themes of this letter in this exposition of the doxology, and lest this commentary becomes excessively lengthy, we are perhaps justified in giving shorter treatments to the remaining sections of this letter, and be pardoned for passing over many of the details.

such a commentary may be useful as a foil for scholars, it is unreliable and useless as a guide to the general reader, because it distorts both Paul's doxology, and also the topics that he brings up in the rest of this letter, such as human depravity, regeneration, reconciliation (between Jews and Gentiles), conversion (repentance and faith), sanctification, and spiritual power and warfare.