

Calvinism on Trial

(Handout – Study Notes)

A Response to Dave Hunt's Attack on the Doctrines of Grace

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Last year Dave Hunt released a thick (444-page) book titled, *What Love Is This? Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God*. As the subtitle suggests, Mr. Hunt is strongly opposed to Calvinism. In effect, he says Calvinism is a different gospel. He also suggests that the teaching of Calvinism so misrepresents God that Calvinists are guilty of worshiping a god of their own making. He has such harsh words for Calvinists that many readers have concluded he is consigning Calvinism to the dung-heap of the cults—and in several places one might even get the impression he is not too sure about the salvation of anyone who is committed to Calvinism as a system of theology.

Dave Hunt, in typical fashion, writes with an authoritative tone and overbearing conviction. Banking on his reputation as a keen discernor of error and a bold exposor of heretics, he gives the impression of a man on a lonely, desperate crusade to rescue the evangelical movement from its most subtle and deadly enemy yet.

What is this latest threat to orthodoxy among evangelicals? Turns out it's the theology of all the key Protestant Reformers. It's the theology of the Puritans. It's the theology of Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and Charles Spurgeon. It's also the theology of James Montgomery Boice, R. C. Sproul, Al Mohler, and John MacArthur.

According to Dave Hunt, all of those men are guilty of seriously corrupting the gospel and slandering the character of God. And in his attack on their theology, Hunt pulls no punches. He charges them with turning God into a monster, making men into puppets, and replacing the concept of grace with an unjust notion of divine favoritism. He emphatically believes that God is obliged to love everyone the same. He denies that God has foreordained whatever comes to pass. And he is convinced that Calvinists worship a god who does violence to the human will.

In short, Dave Hunt's book is a digest of every hackneyed argument ever brought against Calvinism. He brings together both the best and the worst of anti-Calvinist thought, blending and repackaging it all in a format that is easy to read and understand. He gives the impression of thoroughness and scholarship. And he aims to convince the naive that this difficult subject is really quite simple.

I normally like to begin every book review by saying something positive about the book. There's simply not anything good I can sincerely say about *this* book. It is seriously flawed by a number of significant shortcomings:

POOR RESEARCH

Dave Hunt severely misunderstands and misrepresents the history of Calvinism. It seems he has spent much of his life arguing against fringe groups and cults. Now, he has decided to portray Calvinism as a fringe idea or a cult, simply because he doesn't like it. Calvinism offends his common-sense notions of justice and love. In correspondence about his book, he has complained that he is "mystified" by the arguments for God's sovereignty in salvation. He often appeals to common sense and rational arguments (rather than the Bible) to make his points about the character of God—as if he has forgotten that Scripture, not human wisdom, is the means by which God has revealed Himself to us.

Hunt is simply wrong to portray Calvinism as a divergent theology foreign to mainstream evangelicalism. It is an unassailable matter of fact that *all* the major Protestant Reformers essentially agreed on the doctrines of divine sovereignty and the bondage of the human will. Hunt's own "free-will" soteriology is the innovation. On this issue, he is closer to classic Tridentine Roman Catholicism than he is to historic Protestantism.

In a radio interview on August 11, 2000, Dave Hunt told James White, "I'm very ignorant of the Reformers. I have not had time to read them. Uh, there are truckloads, I guess, of their writings. And I like to just kind of pretend that we're back there in the days of the apostles before all of these things were written. And I like to go to the Bible. So whether a Reformer said this or that, I don't know."

Within two months after making that statement, however, Dave Hunt was offering his manuscript debunking the Reformers' theology for preliminary reviews. Within eighteen months, the book was published, filled with copious quotations *about* Calvin and the Reformers, but with almost no quotations from any leading Calvinists or Calvinist creeds that would allow them to explain what they believe *in their own words*.

Instead, Hunt routinely borrows selective quotations from anti-Calvinist sources in order to portray Calvin as a man whose "grossly un-Christian behavior as the 'Protestant Pope' of Geneva" is a blight on church history (p. 13). Hunt also claims that Calvinism stems from Roman Catholic roots and insists that "most of those who regard themselves Calvinists are largely unaware of what John Calvin and his early followers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries actually believed and practiced" (*ibid.*). So now, barely more than two meager years after the admission he made to James White, Dave Hunt says the *Calvinists*, not Dave Hunt, are the ignorant ones when it comes to the facts of what the Protestant Reformers believed and practiced.

It therefore seems fair to ask: How, precisely, did Dave Hunt gain so much expertise about the Reformers *after* his radio interview with James White in August 2000 (when he boasted of his own ignorance) and *before* he finished writing his book a few scant months later (where he lectures Calvinists regarding *their* supposed ignorance of the "real" facts about Calvin and the Reformation)?

Dave Hunt's actual "research" method seems to consist of reading some virulently anti-Calvinist resources and assembling a digest of their favorite arguments (with hardly any reference to the careful and copious answers to those arguments Calvinist authors have already published). Hunt quotes frequently from recent anti-Calvinist authors such as Laurence Vance (*The other Side of Calvinism*); George Bryson (*The Five Points of Calvinism: Weighed and Found Wanting*); and Norm Geisler (*Chosen but Free*). But if he ever quotes Calvin, Spurgeon, or any other historic Calvinist leader, it is nearly always to cite something another anti-Calvinist author has

already used to make an argument against Calvinism. Furthermore, he almost never quotes a Calvinist without an instant and facile dismissal of the Calvinist position.

Hunt's own footnotes also show that he relies far too heavily on secondary sources. Even when primary sources are readily available, he often doesn't bother to go to the original sources to check his citations.

This practice may be the reason for an embarrassing error in Hunt's treatment of Charles Spurgeon. On page 19, Hunt makes this claim: "Spurgeon himself, so often quoted by Calvinists to support their view, rejected Limited Atonement, though it lies at the very heart of Calvinism and follows inevitably from its other points—and he did so in unequivocal language." Hunt then quotes a passage from Spurgeon's "A Defence of Calvinism" in which Spurgeon defended the infinite sufficiency of Christ's atoning work.

The problem for Hunt is that *all* mainstream Calvinists affirm the infinite *sufficiency* of the atonement. Even the Canons of the Synod of Dordt, the original manifesto of "Five Point Calvinism" states, "The death of the Son of God is the only and most perfect sacrifice and satisfaction for sin, and *is of infinite worth and value*, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world" (2nd Head, art. 3).

Moreover, *in the very article Hunt was quoting from*, Spurgeon wrote,

If Christ on His cross intended to save every man, then He intended to save those who were lost before He died. If the doctrine be true, that He died for all men, then He died for some who were in hell before He came into this world, for doubtless there were even then myriads there who had been cast away because of their sins. Once again, if it was Christ's intention to save all men, how deplorably has He been disappointed, for we have His own testimony that there is a lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, and into that pit of woe have been cast some of the very persons who, according to the theory of universal redemption, were bought with His blood. That seems to me a conception a thousand times more repulsive than any of those consequences which are said to be associated with the Calvinistic and Christian doctrine of special and particular redemption.

If Hunt had simply checked the context of the original quotation, he could not have honestly claimed that Spurgeon "rejected Limited Atonement . . . in unequivocal language." I believe Hunt's error was not deliberately duplicitous but stemmed from shoddy and hasty research—as did many of the errors found in his work. Yet even after his error about Spurgeon was pointed out to him, Hunt refused to acknowledge the error, insisting instead that Spurgeon, like all Calvinists, was guilty of self-contradiction.

BAD ARGUMENTS

Another major flaw in Hunt's book is the abundance of faulty arguments: question-begging circular arguments, poisoning the well, *ad hominem arguments*, appeals to emotion, hasty generalizations, appeals to ignorance, non sequiturs, appeals to tradition, slippery-slope arguments, straw men, and so on. *What Love Is This?* is glutted with logical fallacies. It would make a fine "how-not-to" model for a course on basic logic. One reviewer, John Barber, writes, "Hunt apparently hopes that these logical fallacies will, if repeated enough, discredit Calvinism"

(“Review: Dave Hunt’s *What Love Is This?*” [IIIM Magazine Online, Volume 4, Number 17]). Barber adds,

For example, Hunt offers a quote from Calvin referring to the Church as “Mother,” and then points out that “The only church called ‘mother’ is the MOTHER OF HARLOTS (Revelation 17:5), the false church headquartered at the Vatican” (p. 27). Hunt also wants to be sure that Calvin’s upbringing within a “devoutly religious Roman Catholic family” is not lost on the reader, the inference being that a swatch cut from the cloth never loses its pattern.

Hunt continues to stretch for more proof that much of Calvinism is “warmed over Roman Catholicism” when he asserts that Calvin borrowed from Rome a form of church government that included “a clergy with special powers.” Of course, the “clergy” Hunt refers to, and which Calvin supported, is nothing more than the presence of ordained pastors in the church. Non-Calvinist clergy might wonder if, by this standard, they too are not somehow guilty of harboring hidden affections for Rome. (Ibid.)

An example of the muddled thinking that surrounded the production of Hunt’s book may be seen by comparing the ad campaign the publisher employed while promoting the book with Hunt’s statements in the book itself. In Loyal Publishing’s original ad for *What Love Is This?* banner headlines said, “Did You know that . . . [according to Calvinism] You *can’t* be born again until after you are saved?” But on page 95 of the book, Hunt’s complaint is the precise opposite: “The Calvinist insists that regeneration must precede salvation.” (Ironically, this baffling contradiction appears in a section Hunt has labeled “Calvinism’s Admitted Irrationality.”)

Meanwhile, Hunt’s discussion of the *ordo salutis* and the relationship of faith to regeneration is severely marred by his appalling ignorance of the issues and the lack of any reference whatsoever to the voluminous literature dealing with the subject.

That brings to mind a frustrating inconsistency in the way Hunt frames his whole argument: Does he claim to be an expert on Calvinism, or does he not? When it seems to suit his purposes, as in the James White radio interview cited above, Hunt pretends to be a theological bumpkin—an anti-intellectual, unread, simple-minded doctrinal peasant. When he is in this mode, he plays the “elitism” card, charging Calvinists with making the truth so complex and incomprehensible that none but a Doctor of Divinity could ever decipher the gospel. He boasts of how little he reads the writings of men. He glories in his lack of formal education. He jeers at those who think an understanding of Greek is really necessary for careful exegesis. And he lobs charges of intellectual snobbery at his adversaries.

But at other times, when his agenda for the moment is different, Mr. Hunt recounts how many hours he has invested in study. He assumes an air of dogmatic authority (especially in his pronouncements about historical theology and the supposed Catholic roots of Calvinism). He complains that his opponents are ignorant, self-contradictory, and irrational.

I don’t believe Mr. Hunt lacks basic intelligence. Whatever deficiencies exist in his own study and training are clearly deliberate on his part. Therefore it is difficult to resist the conclusion that his refusal to understand and correctly describe what Calvinists believe and teach is a willful, bigoted blindness.

WRONG PRESUPPOSITIONS

In that same vein, Dave Hunt's opinion of Calvinism is seriously marred by his own vehement insistence in espousing several wrong presuppositions. I know his misconceptions on these issues have been patiently, thoroughly confronted and corrected by his own Calvinist friends, because written records of those discourses are all over the Internet. But Hunt stubbornly persists in putting his own spin on Calvinism, rather than allowing Calvinists to speak for themselves about what they believe.

As a result, he maintains, in effect, that the doctrine of election is all about reprobation. He misrepresents the nature of divine grace, making grace and mercy something God is *obliged* to show equally to all people. (How mercy can be both gratuitous and obligatory at the same time never seems to trouble Hunt.) And, making the age-old error every naive Arminian since Pelagius has made, Hunt *insists* that human responsibility implies human ability.

This is close to the very heart of Dave Hunt's error. He is convinced that a sinner's obligation is limited by his ability—so that if fallen man *cannot* live up to a divine standard, then the standard itself is unjust.

That ignores everything the Bible teaches about why the law is deadly to sinners. Sinners, by definition, cannot live up to the law's standard. They cannot perfectly obey even the first and greatest commandment ("Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind"—Matt. 22:37). Much less can they fulfill this chilling demand of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). Does Dave Hunt seriously believe obedience to *that* commandment lies within the scope of his abilities? If not, will he argue that Jesus unjustly set the standard too high?

These are basic theological issues, and the stacks of meaty commentaries and systematic theologies that deal with them expertly would probably fill a large barn. But Dave Hunt dismisses all that without a single argument from Scripture or sound reason because he is convinced it is a self-evident truth that God would never ask fallen sinner to do anything that is impossible for sinners to do. Hunt's entire house of cards is therefore blown away by the clear statement of Romans 8:7-8: "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, *neither indeed can be*. So then they that are in the flesh *cannot* please God."

STRAW MEN

Naturally, Hunt's own faulty presuppositions become the stuffing material for an impressive array of straw men he assembles.

He insists, for example, that Calvinism makes God the author and effectual cause of sin (a common misconception refuted clearly and definitively by virtually every Calvinist who ever explored the subject, and by every Calvinist creed that ever addressed it). In fact, the (thoroughly Calvinistic) Westminster Confession of Faith (III.1) says, "God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby *neither is God the author of sin*, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, *nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established*". That is the very thing Dave Hunt repeatedly claims Calvinists deny.

Hunt also continually suggests that Calvinists believe only a few will finally be saved—an accusation strongly refuted by a host of Calvinists from Calvin himself to Charles Spurgeon to Lorraine Boettner. (Hunt lists several major Calvinist resources in his bibliography. Why does he not interact with their arguments?)

Most of all, Hunt contends that Calvinism demeans and diminishes the love of God. This accusation is reflected in the title and subtitle of the book. In short, Hunt deliberately ignores any distinction between Calvinism and hyper-Calvinism, maintaining that all the errors of hyper-Calvinism are simply the logical and necessary conclusions to which all brands of Calvinism inexorably lead.

One of Dave Hunt's favorite straw men is the notion that Calvinism is inextricably linked with John Calvin, as if the validity of these doctrines automatically stand or fall on the character of the great Reformer. As a result, Hunt devotes a considerable amount of energy to besmirching and defaming John Calvin's reputation. In fact, before chapter 1 even begins, Dave Hunt has gone out of the way to demonize Calvin by painting him as a ruthless despot and a self-styled Protestant Pope whose "grossly un-Christian behavior," Hunt claims, would shock anyone who really knew (p. 13).

Hunt, well known for his outspoken opposition to Roman Catholicism, is not the least bit hesitant to borrow calumnies against Calvin from the very same Roman Catholic apologists Hunt concedes (in other contexts) are deliberately misleading and utterly unreliable in their portrayals of the rest of Protestant history and theology. But here, he happily sides with the enemies of Protestantism, unflinchingly citing both modern and medieval Catholic propaganda as if it were unassailable fact—as long as it serves his purpose of sullyng Calvin's reputation.

Hunt's incessant charges of elitism are a straw man argument, too. Such hypocritical posturing is unbecoming for an apologist of Dave Hunt's stature. James White's analysis of the "elitism" excuse is right on target:

Elitism. The word immediately calls to mind attitudes of snobbery and arrogance. In today's politically correct "labels are what carry the debate" world, it is a great tool. It sticks to a person like grape juice on a carpet: once the accusation is made, it is next to impossible to refute it. And it has the wonderful advantage of inflaming the emotions. When you are in a lost position, and your opponent is closing in for the kill, it functions very much like the scent glands in a skunk. It can often provide the way of escape by ending all rational thought and giving you a last ditch weapon to use against someone (and it requires absolutely no truth to utilize, too!).

I do not recall ever having been called an elitist until Dave Hunt did so in a letter in 2001. I had challenged him on a point of Greek. Now mind you, he raised it. He made claims in a talk he gave against Calvinism at a Calvary Chapel, and I pointed out that he was simply wrong. Now, logically, since Mr. Hunt raised the issue by making assertions about the Greek language (grammar, meaning, etc.), he cannot possibly accuse others of elitism for referencing the same field when he himself does so. But the key term there is "logically," since the charge of elitism is not based in logic, but in emotion and tradition. Hence, the glory of the allegation: you do not have to provide a meaningful basis for its use. You can raise issues of Greek, and even do as Dave Hunt does in his lectures and books, wherein he makes grand assertions about the "correct" translation of a term, or the "meaning" of this Greek word, without, somehow, becoming an "elitist" in the process! But, you can accuse anyone who comes along and demonstrates that

you are in error in your assertions of being an “elitist,” and as a bonus, act as if the charge you have made refutes the demonstration of your error, so that you can continue making the same error even though you have not responded to the facts that show that you are wrong!

Of course, if you have time to do it, the charge works much better when it is combined with an emotional appeal to the audience. If you can (implicitly, of course) make the assertion that you are a victim, and that the “elitist” has “attacked” you, all the better. The resultant cascade of emotions should cloud all but the most trained minds, not only allowing you a tactical retreat, but, if you so choose, the opportunity, at least in the minds of some, of turning a lost situation into a victory!

It is hard to resist the conclusion that Dave Hunt willfully misrepresents his opponents in his desperate quest to multiply scarecrows. In a message Hunt recently gave at Greg Laurie’s Calvary Chapel, Hunt implied that he had read John MacArthur’s book, *The Love of God*. He summarized the message of the book with these words: “Basically it tells you God doesn’t love everybody.” Actually, MacArthur’s book *refutes* the hyper-Calvinist notion that God doesn’t love everyone. But Hunt is so determined to tar MacArthur with the hyper-Calvinist brush that he actually quotes a statement MacArthur spent several pages *refuting*, and he attributes the offending statement to MacArthur!

These are not the tactics of someone who is genuinely concerned about the truth.

AN UNCHARITABLE VIEW OF HIS OPPONENTS

Finally, Dave Hunt’s book is seriously marred by harsh rhetoric and an attitude toward Calvinism that often seems bigoted in the extreme. He routinely accuses Calvinists of worshiping a god of their own making and preaching a distorted gospel of their own devising. Such accusations, if true, would warrant the harshest anathemas (Gal. 1:8-9).

I realize that some who call themselves Calvinists take a similar stance against Arminianism, insisting that no Arminian can possibly be a true Christian. I have always plainly stated that such extreme intolerance on the part of self-styled “Calvinists” is actually a form of *hyper-Calvinism*, reflecting an uncharitable attitude that is unwarranted by any teaching of Scripture. The gospel—including the facts of Jesus’ deity, His incarnation, His death, His resurrection, and the doctrine of justification by faith—is the touchstone of orthodoxy (Rom. 4:4-5; 2 John 7-11; Gal. 1:8-9), *not what one believes about predestination, effectual calling, or the extent of the atonement*.

But if that sort of hyper-Calvinistic apartheid deserves to be condemned, then the same sort of factiousness coming from an Arminian perspective is equally repulsive and worthy of rebuke. (And Dave Hunt’s perspective *is* classic Arminianism, even though he seems to eschew that label).

In other words, Dave Hunt’s book is unnecessarily divisive. That has been proven by the fruit of the debate, including the immoderate attitudes and accusations Hunt’s campaign has engendered. I know of at least two churches that were literally split when overzealous lay readers of Hunt’s book tried to drum up campaigns to dump their pastors for “teaching the deadly error of predestination.” *What Love Is This?* is a thoroughly bad book, and unfortunately it is has

undermined Mr. Hunt's credibility and the value of the work he has done in the past to expose real errors.

Mr. Hunt, his editors, and his fellow workers have all complained bitterly that such criticism of his rabid anti-Calvinism is itself inherently uncharitable and mean-spirited. He would no doubt dismiss all my criticisms with the same convenient complaint. Unfortunately, his book is so fraught with fallacies, false accusations, and other flaws that the only appropriate way to evaluate his work is to point out the problems plainly. I'm very sorry Mr. Hunt (who has always professed an appreciation for plain-spokenness) seems to feel all criticism of *his* work is unfair. But I have read reams of his critics' comments, and for the most part (with a few notable and unfortunate exceptions), they have been far more cautious, measured, and charitable than Mr. Hunt himself has been. His constant complaining about his critics' *tone* is for the most part both totally uncalled for and extremely hypocritical.

At the end of the day, *What Love Is This?* is a really bad book. Unfortunately, there's no way to be truthful about that and make it sound like a compliment. Sometimes—and this is one of those times—a compliment would just be the wrong message to send.

“That God predestines, and that man is responsible, are two things that few can see. They are believed to be inconsistent and contradictory; but they are not. It is just the fault of our weak judgment. Two truths cannot be contradictory to each other. If, then, I find taught in one place that everything is fore-ordained, that is true; and if I find in another place that man is responsible for all his actions, that is true; and it is my folly that leads me to imagine that two truths can ever contradict each other. These two truths, I do not believe, can ever be welded into one upon any human anvil, but one they shall be in eternity: they are two lines that are so nearly parallel, that the mind that shall pursue them farthest, will never discover that they converge; but they do converge, and they will meet somewhere in eternity, close to the throne of God, whence all truth doth spring” (Charles Spurgeon, “Sovereign Grace and Man's Responsibility,” New Park Street Pulpit, vol. 4).

A Defense of Calvinism

by

C. H. Spurgeon

The old truth that Calvin preached, that Augustine preached, that Paul preached, is the truth that I must preach to-day, or else be false to my conscience and my God. I cannot shape the truth; I know of no such thing as paring off the rough edges of a doctrine. John Knox's gospel is my gospel. That which thundered through Scotland must thunder through England again.

It is a great thing to begin the Christian life by believing good solid doctrine. Some people have received twenty different "gospels" in as many years; how many more they will accept before they get to their journey's end, it would be difficult to predict. I thank God that He early taught me *the* gospel, and I have been so perfectly satisfied with it, that I do not want to know any other. Constant change of creed is sure loss. If a tree has to be taken up two or three times a year, you will not need to build a very large loft in which to store the apples. When people are always shifting their doctrinal principles, they are not likely to bring forth much fruit to the glory of God. It is good for young believers to begin with a firm hold upon those great fundamental doctrines which the Lord has taught in His Word. Why, if I believed what some preach about the temporary, trumpery salvation which only lasts for a time, I would scarcely be at all grateful for it; but when I know that those whom God saves He saves with an everlasting salvation, when I know that He gives to them an everlasting righteousness, when I know that He settles them on an everlasting foundation of everlasting love, and that He will bring them to His everlasting kingdom, oh, then I do wonder, and I am astonished that such a blessing as this should ever have been given to me!

"Pause, my soul! adore, and wonder!
Ask, 'Oh, why such love to me?'
Grace hath put me in the number
Of the Saviour's family:
Hallelujah!
Thanks, eternal thanks, to Thee!"

I suppose there are some persons whose minds naturally incline towards the doctrine of free-will. I can only say that mine inclines as naturally towards the doctrines of sovereign grace. Sometimes, when I see some of the worst characters in the street, I feel as if my heart must burst forth in tears of gratitude that God has never let me act as they have done! I have thought, if God had left me alone, and had not touched me by His grace, what a great sinner I should have been! I should have run to the utmost lengths of sin, dived into the very depths of evil, nor should I have stopped at any vice or folly, if God had not restrained me. I feel that I should have been a very king of sinners, if God had let me alone. I cannot understand the reason why I am saved, except upon the ground that God would have it so. I cannot, if I look ever so earnestly, discover any kind of reason in myself why I should be a partaker of Divine grace. If I am not at this moment without Christ, it is only because Christ Jesus would have His will with me, and that will was that I should be with Him where He is, and should share His glory. I can put the crown nowhere but upon the

head of Him whose mighty grace has saved me from going down into the pit. Looking back on my past life, I can see that the dawning of it all was of God; of God effectively. I took no torch with which to light the sun, but the sun enlightened me. I did not commence my spiritual life—no, I rather kicked, and struggled against the things of the Spirit: when He drew me, for a time I did not run after Him: there was a natural hatred in my soul of everything holy and good. Wooings were lost upon me—warnings were cast to the wind—thunders were despised; and as for the whispers of His love, they were rejected as being less than nothing and vanity. But, sure I am, I can say now, speaking on behalf of myself, “He only is my salvation.” It was He who turned my heart, and brought me down on my knees before Him. I can in very deed, say with Doddridge and Toplady—

“Grace taught my soul to pray,
And made my eyes o’erflow;”

and coming to this moment, I can add—

“’Tis grace *has* kept me to this day,
And will not let me go.”

Well can I remember the manner in which I learned the doctrines of grace in a single instant. Born, as all of us are by nature, an Arminian, I still believed the old things I had heard continually from the pulpit, and did not see the grace of God. When I was coming to Christ, I thought I was doing it all myself, and though I sought the Lord earnestly, I had no idea the Lord was seeking me. I do not think the young convert is at first aware of this. I can recall the very day and hour when first I received those truths in my own soul—when they were, as John Bunyan says, burnt into my heart as with a hot iron, and I can recollect how I felt that I had grown on a sudden from a babe into a man—that I had made progress in Scriptural knowledge, through having found, once for all, the clue to the truth of God. One week-night, when I was sitting in the house of God, I was not thinking much about the preacher’s sermon, for I did not believe it. The thought struck me, *How did you come to be a Christian?* I sought the Lord. *But how did you come to seek the Lord?* The truth flashed across my mind in a moment—I should not have sought Him unless there had been some previous influence in my mind to *make me* seek Him. I prayed, thought I, but then I asked myself, *How came I to pray?* I was induced to pray by reading the Scriptures. *How came I to read the Scriptures?* I did read them, but what led me to do so? Then, in a moment, I saw that God was at the bottom of it all, and that He was the Author of my faith, and so the whole doctrine of grace opened up to me, and from that doctrine I have not departed to this day, and I desire to make this my constant confession, “I ascribe my change wholly to God.”

I once attended a service where the text happened to be, “*He shall choose our inheritance for us;*” and the good man who occupied the pulpit was more than a little of an Arminian. Therefore, when he commenced, he said, “This passage refers entirely to our temporal inheritance, it has nothing whatever to do with our everlasting destiny, for,” said he, “we do not want Christ to choose for us in the matter of Heaven or hell. It is so plain and easy, that every man who has a grain of common sense will choose Heaven, and any person would know better than to choose hell. We have no need of any superior intelligence, or any greater Being, to choose Heaven or hell for us. It is left to our own free-will, and we have enough wisdom given us,

sufficiently correct means to judge for ourselves,” and therefore, as he very logically inferred, there was no necessity for Jesus Christ, or anyone, to make a choice for us. We could choose the inheritance for ourselves without any assistance. “Ah!” I thought, “but, my good brother, it may be very true that we *could*, but I think we should want something more than common sense before we *should* choose aright.”

First, let me ask, must we not all of us admit an over-ruling Providence, and the appointment of Jehovah’s hand, as to the means whereby we came into this world? Those men who think that, afterwards, we are left to our own free-will to choose this one or the other to direct our steps, must admit that our entrance into the world was not of our own will, but that God had then to choose for us. What circumstances were those in our power which led us to elect certain persons to be our parents? Had we anything to do with it? Did not God Himself appoint our parents, native place, and friends? Could He not have caused me to be born with the skin of the Hottentot, brought forth by a filthy mother who would nurse me in her “kraal,” and teach me to bow down to Pagan gods, quite as easily as to have given me a pious mother, who would each morning and night bend her knee in prayer on my behalf? Or, might He not, if He had pleased, have given me some profligate to have been my parent, from whose lips I might have early heard fearful, filthy, and obscene language? Might He not have placed me where I should have had a drunken father, who would have immured me in a very dungeon of ignorance, and brought me up in the chains of crime? Was it not God’s Providence that I had so happy a lot, that both my parents were His children, and endeavoured to train me up in the fear of the Lord?

John Newton used to tell a whimsical story, and laugh at it, too, of a good woman who said, in order to prove the doctrine of election, “Ah! sir, the Lord must have loved me before I was born, or else He would not have seen anything in me to love afterwards.” I am sure it is true in my case; I believe the doctrine of election, because I am quite certain that, if God had not chosen me, I should never have chosen Him; and I am sure He chose me before I was born, or else He never would have chosen me afterwards; and He must have elected me for reasons unknown to me, for I never could find any reason in myself why He should have looked upon me with special love. So I am forced to accept that great Biblical doctrine. I recollect an Arminian brother telling me that he had read the Scriptures through a score or more times, and could never find the doctrine of election in them. He added that he was sure he would have done so if it had been there, for he read the Word on his knees. I said to him, “I think you read the Bible in a very uncomfortable posture, and if you had read it in your easy chair, you would have been more likely to understand it. Pray, by all means, and the more, the better, but it is a piece of superstition to think there is anything in the posture in which a man puts himself for reading: and as to reading through the Bible twenty times without having found anything about the doctrine of election, the wonder is that you found anything at all: you must have galloped through it at such a rate that you were not likely to have any intelligible idea of the meaning of the Scriptures.”

If it would be marvelous to see one river leap up from the earth full-grown, what would it be to gaze upon a vast spring from which all the rivers of the earth should at once come bubbling up, a million of them born at a birth? What a vision would it be! Who can conceive it. And yet the love of God is that fountain, from which all the rivers of mercy, which have ever gladdened our race—all the rivers of grace in time, and of glory hereafter—take their rise. My soul, stand thou at that sacred fountain-head, and adore and magnify, for ever and ever, God, even our Father, who hath loved us! In the very beginning, when this great universe lay in the mind of God, like unborn forests in the acorn cup; long ere the echoes awoke the solitudes; before the mountains were brought forth; and long ere the light flashed through the sky, God loved His chosen creatures. Before there was any created being—when the ether was not fanned by an angel’s wing, when space itself had not an existence, when there was nothing save God alone—even then, in that loneliness of Deity, and in that deep quiet and profundity, His bowels moved with love for His chosen. Their names were written on His heart, and then were they dear to His soul. Jesus loved His people before the foundation of the world—even from eternity! and when He called me by His

grace, He said to me, "I have loved *thee* with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee."

Then, in the fulness of time, He purchased me with His blood; He let His heart run out in one deep gaping wound for me long ere I loved Him. Yea, when He first came to me, did I not spurn Him? When He knocked at the door, and asked for entrance, did I not drive Him away, and do despite to His grace? Ah, I can remember that I full often did so until, at last, by the power of His effectual grace, He said, "I must, I will come in;" and then He turned my heart, and made me love Him. But even till now I should have resisted Him, had it not been for His grace. Well, then since He purchased me when I was dead in sins, does it not follow, as a consequence necessary and logical, that He must have loved me first? Did my Saviour die for me because I believed on Him? No; I was not then in existence; I had then no being. Could the Saviour, therefore, have died because I had faith, when I myself was not yet born? Could that have been possible? Could that have been the origin of the Saviour's love towards me? Oh! no; my Saviour died for me long before I believed. "But," says someone, "He foresaw that you would have faith; and, therefore, He loved you." What did He foresee about my faith? Did He foresee that I should get that faith myself, and that I should believe on Him of myself? No; Christ could not foresee that, because no Christian man will ever say that faith came of itself without the gift and without the working of the Holy Spirit. I have met with a great many believers, and talked with them about this matter; but I never knew one who could put his hand on his heart, and say, "I believed in Jesus without the assistance of the Holy Spirit."

I am bound to the doctrine of the depravity of the human heart, because I find myself depraved in heart, and have daily proofs that in my flesh there dwelleth no good thing. If God enters into covenant with unfallen man, man is so insignificant a creature that it must be an act of gracious condescension on the Lord's part; but if God enters into covenant with *sinful* man, he is then so offensive a creature that it must be, on God's part, an act of pure, free, rich, sovereign grace. When the Lord entered into covenant with me, I am sure that it was all of grace, nothing else but grace. When I remember what a den of unclean beasts and birds my heart was, and how strong was my unrenewed will, how obstinate and rebellious against the sovereignty of the Divine rule, I always feel inclined to take the very lowest room in my Father's house, and when I enter Heaven, it will be to go among the less than the least of all saints, and with the chief of sinners.

The late lamented Mr. Denham has put, at the foot of his portrait, a most admirable text, "Salvation is of the Lord." That is just an epitome of Calvinism; it is the sum and substance of it. If anyone should ask me what I mean by a Calvinist, I should reply, "He is one who says, *Salvation is of the Lord.*" I cannot find in Scripture any other doctrine than this. It is the essence of the Bible. "He *only* is my rock and my salvation." Tell me anything contrary to this truth, and it will be a heresy; tell me a heresy, and I shall find its essence here, that it has departed from this great, this fundamental, this rock-truth, "God is my rock and my salvation." What is the heresy of Rome, but the addition of something to the perfect merits of Jesus Christ—the bringing in of the works of the flesh, to assist in our justification? And what is the heresy of Arminianism but the addition of something to the work of the Redeemer? Every heresy, if brought to the touchstone, will discover itself here. I have my own private opinion that there is no such thing as preaching Christ and Him crucified, unless we preach what nowadays is called Calvinism. It is a nickname to call it Calvinism; Calvinism is the gospel, and nothing else. I do not believe we can preach the gospel, if we do not preach justification by faith, without works; nor unless we preach the sovereignty of God in His dispensation of grace; nor unless we exalt the electing, unchangeable, eternal, immutable, conquering love of Jehovah; nor do I think we can preach the gospel, unless we base it upon the special and particular redemption of His elect and chosen people which Christ wrought out upon the cross; nor can I comprehend a gospel which lets saints fall away after they are called, and suffers the children of God to be burned in the fires of damnation after having once believed in Jesus. Such a gospel I abhor.

“If ever it should come to pass,
That sheep of Christ might fall away,
My fickle, feeble soul, alas!
Would fall a thousand times a day.”

If one dear saint of God had perished, so might all; if one of the covenant ones be lost, so may all be; and then there is no gospel promise true, but the Bible is a lie, and there is nothing in it worth my acceptance. I will be an infidel at once when I can believe that a saint of God can ever fall finally. If God hath loved me once, then He will love me for ever. God has a master-mind; He arranged everything in His gigantic intellect long before He did it; and once having settled it, He never alters it, “This shall be done,” saith He, and the iron hand of destiny marks it down, and it is brought to pass. “This is My purpose,” and it stands, nor can earth or hell alter it. “This is My decree,” saith He, “promulgate it, ye holy angels; rend it down from the gate of Heaven, ye devils, if ye can; but ye cannot alter the decree, it shall stand for ever.” God altereth not His plans; why should He? He is Almighty, and therefore can perform His pleasure. Why should He? He is the All-wise, and therefore cannot have planned wrongly. Why should He? He is the everlasting God, and therefore cannot die before His plan is accomplished. Why should He change? Ye worthless atoms of earth, ephemera of a day, ye creeping insects upon this bay-leaf of existence, ye may change *your* plans, but He shall never, never change *His*. Has He told me that His plan is to save me? If so, I am for ever safe.

“My name from the palms of His hands
Eternity will not erase;
Impress’d on His heart it remains,
In marks of indelible grace.”

I do not know how some people, who believe that a Christian can fall from grace, manage to be happy. It must be a very commendable thing in them to be able to get through a day without despair. If I did not believe the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints, I think I should be of all men the most miserable, because I should lack any ground of comfort. I could not say, whatever state of heart I came into, that I should be like a well-spring of water, whose stream fails not; I should rather have to take the comparison of an intermittent spring, that might stop on a sudden, or a reservoir, which I had no reason to expect would always be full. I believe that the happiest of Christians and the truest of Christians are those who never dare to doubt God, but who take His Word simply as it stands, and believe it, and ask no questions, just feeling assured that if God has said it, it will be so. I bear my willing testimony that I have no reason, nor even the shadow of a reason, to doubt my Lord, and I challenge Heaven, and earth, and hell, to bring any proof that God is untrue. From the depths of hell I call the fiends, and from this earth I call the tried and afflicted believers, and to Heaven I appeal, and challenge the long experience of the blood-washed host, and there is not to be found in the three realms a single person who can bear witness to one fact which can disprove the faithfulness of God, or weaken His claim to be trusted by His servants. There are many things that may or may not happen, but this I know *shall* happen—

“He *shall* present my soul,
Unblemish’d and complete,

Before the glory of His face,
With joys divinely great.”

All the purposes of man have been defeated, but not the purposes of God. The promises of man may be broken—many of them are made to be broken—but the promises of God shall all be fulfilled. He is a promise-maker, but He never was a promise-breaker; He is a promise-keeping God, and every one of His people shall prove it to be so. This is my grateful, personal confidence, “The Lord *will* perfect that which concerneth *me*”—unworthy *me*, lost and ruined *me*. He will yet save me; and—

“I, among the blood-wash’d throng,
Shall wave the palm, and wear the crown,
And shout loud victory.”

I go to a land which the plough of earth hath never upturned, where it is greener than earth’s best pastures, and richer than her most abundant harvests ever saw. I go to a building of more gorgeous architecture than man hath ever builded; it is not of mortal design; it is “a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens.” All I shall know and enjoy in Heaven, will be given to me by the Lord, and I shall say, when at last I appear before Him—

“Grace all the work shall crown
Through everlasting days;
It lays in Heaven the topmost stone,
And well deserves the praise.”

I know there are some who think it necessary to their system of theology to limit the merit of the blood of Jesus: if my theological system needed such a limitation, I would cast it to the winds. I cannot, I dare not allow the thought to find a lodging in my mind, it seems so near akin to blasphemy. In Christ’s finished work I see an ocean of merit; my plummet finds no bottom, my eye discovers no shore. There must be sufficient efficacy in the blood of Christ, if God had so willed it, to have saved not only all in this world, but all in ten thousand worlds, had they transgressed their Maker’s law. Once admit infinity into the matter, and limit is out of the question. Having a Divine Person for an offering, it is not consistent to conceive of limited value; bound and measure are terms inapplicable to the Divine sacrifice. The intent of the Divine purpose fixes the *application* of the infinite offering, but does not change it into a finite work. Think of the numbers upon whom God has bestowed His grace already. Think of the countless hosts in Heaven: if thou wert introduced there to-day, thou wouldst find it as easy to tell the stars, or the sands of the sea, as to count the multitudes that are before the throne even now. They have come from the East, and from the West, from the North, and from the South, and they are sitting down with Abraham, and with Isaac, and with Jacob in the Kingdom of God; and beside those in Heaven, think of the saved ones on earth. Blessed be God, His elect on earth are to be counted by millions, I believe, and the days are coming, brighter days than these, when there shall be multitudes upon multitudes brought to know the Saviour, and to rejoice in Him. The Father’s love is not for a few only, but for an exceeding great company. “A great multitude, which no man could number,” will

be found in Heaven. A man can reckon up to very high figures; set to work your Newtons, your mightiest calculators, and they can count great numbers, but God and God alone can tell the multitude of His redeemed. I believe there will be more in Heaven than in hell. If anyone asks me why I think so, I answer, because Christ, in everything, is to "have the pre-eminence," and I cannot conceive how He could have the pre-eminence if there are to be more in the dominions of Satan than in Paradise. Moreover, I have never read that there is to be in hell a great multitude, which no man could number. I rejoice to know that the souls of all infants, as soon as they die, speed their way to Paradise. Think what a multitude there is of them! Then there are already in Heaven unnumbered myriads of the spirits of just men made perfect—the redeemed of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues up till now; and there are better times coming, when the religion of Christ shall be universal; when—

"He shall reign from pole to pole,
With illimitable sway;"

when whole kingdoms shall bow down before Him, and nations shall be born in a day, and in the thousand years of the great millennial state there will be enough saved to make up all the deficiencies of the thousands of years that have gone before. Christ shall be Master everywhere, and His praise shall be sounded in every land. Christ shall have the pre-eminence at last; His train shall be far larger than that which shall attend the chariot of the grim monarch of hell.

Some persons love the doctrine of universal atonement because they say, "It is so beautiful. It is a lovely idea that Christ should have died for all men; it commends itself," they say, "to the instincts of humanity; there is something in it full of joy and beauty." I admit there is, but beauty may be often associated with falsehood. There is much which I might admire in the theory of universal redemption, but I will just show what the supposition necessarily involves. If Christ on His cross intended to save every man, then He intended to save those who were lost before He died. If the doctrine be true, that He died for all men, then He died for some who were in hell before He came into this world, for doubtless there were even then myriads there who had been cast away because of their sins. Once again, if it was Christ's intention to save all men, how deplorably has He been disappointed, for we have His own testimony that there is a lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, and into that pit of woe have been cast some of the very persons who, according to the theory of universal redemption, were bought with His blood. That seems to me a conception a thousand times more repulsive than any of those consequences which are said to be associated with the Calvinistic and Christian doctrine of special and particular redemption. To think that my Saviour died for men who were or are in hell, seems a supposition too horrible for me to entertain. To imagine for a moment that He was the Substitute for all the sons of men, and that God, having first punished the Substitute, afterwards punished the sinners themselves, seems to conflict with all my ideas of Divine justice. That Christ should offer an atonement and satisfaction for the sins of all men, and that afterwards some of those very men should be punished for the sins for which Christ had already atoned, appears to me to be the most monstrous iniquity that could ever have been imputed to Saturn, to Janus, to the goddess of the Thugs, or to the most diabolical heathen deities. God forbid that we should ever think thus of Jehovah, the just and wise and good!

There is no soul living who holds more firmly to the doctrines of grace than I do, and if any man asks me whether I am ashamed to be called a Calvinist, I answer—I wish to be called nothing but a Christian; but if you ask me, do I hold the doctrinal views which were held by John Calvin, I reply, I do in the main hold them, and rejoice to avow it. But far be it from me even to imagine that Zion contains none but Calvinistic Christians within her walls, or that there are none saved who do not hold our views. Most atrocious things have been spoken about the character

and spiritual condition of John Wesley, the modern prince of Arminians. I can only say concerning him that, while I detest many of the doctrines which he preached, yet for the man himself I have a reverence second to no Wesleyan; and if there were wanted two apostles to be added to the number of the twelve, I do not believe that there could be found two men more fit to be so added than George Whitefield and John Wesley. The character of John Wesley stands beyond all imputation for self-sacrifice, zeal, holiness, and communion with God; he lived far above the ordinary level of common Christians, and was one "of whom the world was not worthy." I believe there are multitudes of men who cannot see these truths, or, at least, cannot see them in the way in which we put them, who nevertheless have received Christ as their Saviour, and are as dear to the heart of the God of grace as the soundest Calvinist in or out of Heaven.

I do not think I differ from any of my Hyper-Calvinistic brethren in what I do believe, but I differ from them in what they do not believe. I do not hold any less than they do, but I hold a little more, and, I think, a little more of the truth revealed in the Scriptures. Not only are there a few cardinal doctrines, by which we can steer our ship North, South, East, or West, but as we study the Word, we shall begin to learn something about the North-west and North-east, and all else that lies between the four cardinal points. The system of truth revealed in the Scriptures is not simply one straight line, but two; and no man will ever get a right view of the gospel until he knows how to look at the two lines at once. For instance, I read in one Book of the Bible, "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Yet I am taught, in another part of the same inspired Word, that "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." I see, in one place, God in providence presiding over all, and yet I see, and I cannot help seeing, that man acts as he pleases, and that God has left his actions, in a great measure, to his own free-will. Now, if I were to declare that man was so free to act that there was no control of God over his actions, I should be driven very near to atheism; and if, on the other hand, I should declare that God so over-rules all things that man is not free enough to be responsible, I should be driven at once into Antinomianism or fatalism. That God predestines, and yet that man is responsible, are two facts that few can see clearly. They are believed to be inconsistent and contradictory to each other. If, then, I find taught in one part of the Bible that everything is fore-ordained, *that is true*; and if I find, in another Scripture, that man is responsible for all his actions, *that is true*; and it is only my folly that leads me to imagine that these two truths can ever contradict each other. I do not believe they can ever be welded into one upon any earthly anvil, but they certainly shall be one in eternity. They are two lines that are so nearly parallel, that the human mind which pursues them farthest will never discover that they converge, but they do converge, and they will meet somewhere in eternity, close to the throne of God, whence all truth doth spring.

It is often said that the doctrines we believe have a tendency to lead us to sin. I have heard it asserted most positively, that those high doctrines which we love, and which we find in the Scriptures, are licentious ones. I do not know who will have the hardihood to make that assertion, when they consider that the holiest of men have been believers in them. I ask the man who dares to say that Calvinism is a licentious religion, what he thinks of the character of Augustine, or Calvin, or Whitefield, who in successive ages were the great exponents of the system of grace; or what will he say of the Puritans, whose works are full of them? Had a man been an Arminian in those days, he would have been accounted the vilest heretic breathing, but now we are looked upon as the heretics, and they as the orthodox. We have gone back to the old school; we can trace our descent from the apostles. It is that vein of free-grace, running through the sermonizing of Baptists, which has saved us as a denomination. Were it not for that, we should not stand where we are today. We can run a golden line up to Jesus Christ Himself, through a holy succession of mighty fathers, who all held these glorious truths; and we can ask concerning them, "Where will you find holier and better men in the world?" No doctrine is so calculated to preserve a man from sin as the doctrine of the grace of God. Those who have called it "a licentious doctrine" did not know anything at all about it. Poor ignorant things, they little knew that their own vile stuff was the most licentious doctrine under Heaven. If they knew the grace of

God in truth, they would soon see that there was no preservative from lying like a knowledge that we are elect of God from the foundation of the world. There is nothing like a belief in my eternal perseverance, and the immutability of my Father's affection, which can keep me near to Him from a motive of simple gratitude. Nothing makes a man so virtuous as belief of the truth. A lying doctrine will soon beget a lying practice. A man cannot have an erroneous belief without by-and-by having an erroneous life. I believe the one thing naturally begets the other. Of all men, those have the most disinterested piety, the sublimest reverence, the most ardent devotion, who believe that they are saved by grace, without works, through faith, and that not of themselves, it is the gift of God. Christians should take heed, and see that it always is so, lest by any means Christ should be crucified afresh, and put to an open shame.

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