The Election Collection:

A collection of articles concerning God's one and only plan of salvation by grace alone through Christ Alone

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The Choice - *Man's or God's?*

by Peter Eldersveld

"According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" - Eph 1:4,11

ONE DAY SEVERAL YEARS AGO, the surveyor was working on our street, checking the property lines of vacant lots where new houses were to be built. I noticed that he was very careful about placing his transit-compass, the instrument surveyors use for measuring. When I questioned him about it, he told me that it was absolutely necessary to locate the exact point-of-beginning before any surveying could be done. His transit-compass had to be set precisely over this point, for otherwise all the work would be in vain. If the point-of-beginning were wrong, everything else in the whole area surveyed would be wrong, too; property lines would be confused, and houses misplaced; and the courts would be overrun with cases of angry citizens whose property rights had been violated. So great is the danger, that builders refuse to begin their work until the surveyor has completed his.

There is a lesson in that for a world that is badly askew. Sin has brought disorder and chaos. But the problem has been immensely replicated by our failure to find the right point-of-beginning in the matter of our salvation. We are always prone to think that we must begin with man --- which is another evidence of our sinfulness. We should begin with God; He is the only right point-of-beginning in the search for salvation. And if we don't begin with him, we will only go farther astray. Not only in the world at large but even in the history of the Christian Church do we find evidence of our failure on this score, Both preaching and theology, whether conservative or liberal, have often made man, instead of God, the point-of-beginning. We are so easily tempted to be man-centered in our conception of the gospel. Evangelism seems to be more appealing that way, and theology, too. But that humanistic approach has often led the Church astray, for it invariably accommodates the Word of God to suit the notions of men. In fact, almost every instance of heresy in the history of the Church can traced directly to that wrong point-of-beginning.

You cannot bring men back to God unless that way of their salvation begins with God, Humanism always ends where it starts, namely, with man. The Bible also ends where it starts, namely with God - which is where we want to be, isn't it? The predicament in which we sinners find ourselves is so utterly hopeless that divine redemption is our only way out. The Bible says, what we know to be true from our own honest introspection, that we are "dead in trespasses and sins." And such dead men cannot begin their own resurrection. They must be raised by another-by God. You cannot expect sinners who are depraved by nature to initiate the work of their own redemption. It will have to be initiated by God.

Now the Word of God proves beyond all doubt that He is our point-of-beginning. The classic passage on that is Ephesians 1:4-12. Among other things, it says: "He hath chosen us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world - having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself according to the good pleasure of His will - in whom [Christ] also we have obtained a inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will,"

Now that doctrine of divine election is mentioned no less than forty-eight times in the New Testament alone And no wonder, for it is one of the grandest things we know about God. His plan of redemption is not an afterthought, something He had to devise when man fell into sin; it was not occasioned by the contingencies of history, nor does it depend upon the will of man. From eternity God chose sinners to be

saved, and He did so according to the good pleasure of His will without qualifying conditions of any kind. It was His doing. Its point-of-beginning is with Him in eternity, where also its end will be. This means that our salvation has its origin as well as its destiny in the everlasting God!

However, oddly enough, this glorious truth, which is one of the fundamentals of our faith, is also one of the most controversial teachings in the Bible. It makes some people stiffen with resistance and even wince with pain eve time they hear it. This is particularly true among certain Christians who have a more humanistic theology. And, of course, the reason for their antagonism is quite natural. For the other side of this glorious truth is that if God chose to save some, He necessarily chose not to save others. So, He is not only a God of election but also of reprobation. And that's the part men don't like.

They seem to feel under obligation to defend the character of God against the stigma and responsibility of election and reprobation. The fact that God very plainly assumes this responsibility does not seem to impress them at all. They believe it is better to have men choose God than to have God choose men. And so they take the ultimate decision, as to who will be saved, out of the hands of God and place it in the hands of men, who must then make the choice themselves. And thereby they make man the point-of-beginning - and ending, the Alpha and Omega of his own salvation. He can frustrate God if he wants to.

Now, personally, I am deeply grateful that the Bible presents a God who chooses the sinner, rather than a God who must wait to be chosen. I know that teaching confronts us with some very real and difficult questions which we shall never be able to answer, but I would rather live with those questions than try to escape them by adopting humanistic notions that conflict with God's own revelation of Himself. The fact that we cannot comprehend the mystery of His mercy does not disprove it.

After all, He would be a pretty small God if the sinful human mind could comprehend Him. And if His plan of salvation were comprehensible, if we could make it fit our thinking, it would be like all human plans of salvation which make sense to s but never save us from our sins.

There are so many things we don't understand about God. As the Bible says, His ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts; He is past finding out. That's because He is God! And we ought not to allow our unanswered questions about Him and His Word to prevent us from believing what He declares to be true, even when that conflicts with the confused reasoning of our sinful minds. If we cannot bow humbly and modestly before Him, we have lost our God, and then we have lost also the only real point-of-beginning in the matter of our salvation.

It is interesting to observe that contemporary theologians, both conservative and liberal, who evidently do not believe this Biblical doctrine of divine election, are nevertheless compelled to recognize its underlying principle. Here is one, for example, who says: "In Christianity the initiative is always with God, never with man. All human action is just our response to the active prompting of the living God. It may be an obedient response, or a perverse and willful response. This conception distinguishes Christianity from all other faiths... Before we seek Him, He is out in search of us; and when we think we are discovering some new truth, we are in reality apprehending His self-revelation - Man did not come here by his own volition; he was brought here. God was here before man arrived!"

Well, of course that's right. But then why should we try to take the initiative away from God when it comes to the matter of our own salvation? That certainly proves the perversity of our sinful human nature, doesn't it? Consider what is at stake here.

To begin with, how could you ever become a Christian if you had to choose God rather than be chosen by Him? Why, you know from your own experience as we I as from the Word of God that the natural

inclination of your soul is away from God, not toward Him, If He left the matter up to you, do you think you would ever make the right choice? If God did not choose you and then find you in your sin, do you think you would ever choose Him and then find salvation in Him?

Furthermore, how could we ever bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to sinners if we didn't know that God chose from eternity those who will be saved? Consider the inconsistency of it. We tell men that they are hopelessly lost, dead in trespasses and sins, as the Bible says But then we would proceed to tell them to do something which is utterly impossible for dead men to do, namely, to turn from sin and give their hearts to God. Now those two things are self-contradictory, aren't they?

The only way we can make sense with the gospel is to tell sinners that God has done something about their sinful condition; and not only that He has made salvation available, but that He has actually chosen from eternity those who will receive it; and that they will precisely because He first chose them. As Paul put it in Romans 8: "Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son ... whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?... Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth."

The whole mission effort of the Christian Church rests ultimately upon this doctrine of divine election. Even before we go out into the world with the gospel of Christ, we know that it cannot fail. For those whom God has chosen from eternity will be called, and justified, and glorified. They will be saved, not first of all because they want God, but because He wants them. When we go out with the gospel, we don't know in advance who the chosen ones are, but we do know that the gospel will find them, whoever and wherever they are.

This is the secret of the phenomenal success of the mission effort of the early Church. For example, when Paul and Barnabas preached at Antioch, they found a ready response among the Gentiles, who "glorified the word of the Lord." All of them? No, not all of them. How many? Well, we find the answer in Acts 13:48- "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed." Now that's the whole story of New Testament missions.

The same thing is true today. We preach the gospel everywhere. But only those whom God has chosen actually believe it. There is no other way to explain the difference between a believer and an unbeliever. Both are sinners by nature. The believer is no better than the unbeliever - perhaps worse in some respects. The difference lies in the good pleasure of God, who knows what He is doing, even when He doesn't tell us what it is and why He does it. As the apostle John put it, those, who receive Him, and who become the sons of God, are 'born, not of blood, nor of the will of man, but of God ".

No, Christianity is not a failure in this world use so many people reject it. God never intended to save all men. He tells us plainly in His Word that He has chosen some and not others. And if that disturbs us, if it raises questions in our minds about the justice and love of God, then let us seriously ponder the solemn fact if God had not done the choosing, none of us would ever choose Him! And whatever He does with the rest of us is His business, not ours. One thing is certain we would never find salvation if it were up to us to find it.

Sometimes you will hear people say this doctrine makes men complacent and careless about the matter of their salvation, for they are made to feel that there is nothing they can do about it anyway, since everything depends upon God; if they are chosen, they will be somehow; and if not, well, nothing they do will make any difference.

But is that really true? Do you know any unbeliever who actually uses that as an for his unbelief? No, of course not. That's not why he rejects the gospel. The only people who raise that objection are Christians who think this doctrine will offend and antagonize those whom they want to win for Christ. How strange that God doesn't have the same fear! He certainly wants to bring sinners to Christ, and yet He doesn't hesitate to use this doctrine to call them! And Christ Himself did the same thing. He said. "No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him." Are we supposed to be wiser than God? Do we think we can make the gospel more appealing and more effective if we omit this basic doctrine of divine election, and let sinners think that their salvation depends upon their own free will, which is sinful and depraved, rather than upon the sovereign will of God?

Which is really the more compelling thing to say to men who are sinners by nature, prone to evil, slaves of sin - that they must choose God, or that God must choose them? Which would you rather have me tell you - that God cannot save you unless you first come to Him, or that He has come to you because you would and could not come to Him?

Well, to ask the question is to answer it. And Christians like to put that answer in the words of an old hymn:

T'is not that I did choose Thee,
For, Lord, that could not be,
This heart would still refuse Thee,
Hadst Thou not chosen me.
Thou from the sin that stained me
Hast cleansed and set me free;
Of old Thou hast ordained me,
That I should live to Thee.

Free Will - A Slave

By Charles H. Spurgeon

"And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." John 5:40 ... This is one of the great guns of the Arminians, mounted upon the top of their walls, and often discharged with terrible noise against the poor Christians called Calvinists. I intend to spike the gun this morning, or, rather, to turn it on the enemy, for it was never theirs; it was never cast at their foundry at all, but was intended to teach the very opposite doctrine to that which they assert. Usually, when the text is taken, the divisions are: First, that man has a will. Secondly, that he is entirely free. Thirdly, that men must make themselves willing to come to Christ, otherwise they will not be saved. Now, we shall have no such divisions; but we will endeavour to take a more calm look at the text; and not, because there happen to be the words "will," or "will not" in it, run away with the conclusion that it teaches the doctrine of free-will. It has already been proved beyond all controversy that free-will is nonsense. Freedom cannot belong to will any more than ponderability can belong to electricity. They are altogether different things. Free agency we may believe in, but free-will is simply ridiculous. The will is well known by all to be directed by the understanding, to be moved by motives, to be guided by other parts of the soul, and to be a secondary thing. Philosophy and religion both discard at once the very thought of free-will; and I will go as far as Martin Luther, in that strong assertion of his, where he says, "If any man doth ascribe aught of salvation, even the very least, to the free-will of man, he knoweth nothing of grace, and he hath not learnt Jesus Christ aright." It may seem a harsh sentiment; but he who in his soul believes that man does of his own free-will turn to

God, cannot have been taught of God, for that is one of the first principles taught us when God begins with us, that we have neither will nor power, but that he gives both; that he is "Alpha and Omega" in the salvation of men.

Our four points, this morning, shall be:

First - *that every man is dead*, because it says: "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have *life*."

Secondly - *that there is life in Jesus Christ*: "Ye will not come to *me*, that ye might have life."

Thirdly - that there is life in Christ Jesus *for every one that comes for it:* "Ye will not come to me, that *ye might have life*;" implying that all who go will have life.

And fourthly - the gist of the text lies here, that *no man by nature ever will come to Christ*, for the text says, "Ye will *not* come to me, that ye might have life."

So far from asserting that men of their own wills ever do such a thing, it boldly and flatly denies it, and says, "Ye **WILL NOT** come to me, that ye might have life." Why, beloved, I am almost ready to exclaim, Have all free-willers no knowledge that they dare to run in the teeth of inspiration? Have all those that deny the doctrine of grace no sense? Have they so departed from God that they wrest this to prove free-will; whereas the text says, "Ye **WILL NOT** come to me that ye might have life."

I. First, then, our text implies THAT MEN BY NATURE ARE DEAD.

No being needs to go after life if he has life in himself. The text speaks very strongly when it says, "Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life." Though it saith it not in words, yet it doth in effect affirm that men need a life more than they have themselves. My hearers, we are all dead unless we have been begotten unto a lively hope. First, we are all of us, by nature, *legally* dead - "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt die the death," said God to Adam; and though Adam did not die in that moment naturally, he died legally; that is to say death was recorded against him. As soon as, at the Old Bailey, the judge puts on the black cap and pronounces the sentence, the man is reckoned to be dead at law. Though perhaps a month may intervene before he is brought on the scaffold to endure the sentence of the law, yet the law looks upon him as a dead man. It is impossible for him to transact anything. He cannot inherit, he cannot bequeath; he is nothing - he is a dead man. The country considers him not as being alive in it at all. There is an election - he is not asked for his vote because he is considered as dead. He is shut up in his condemned cell, and he is dead. Ah! and ye ungodly sinners who have never had life in Christ, ye are alive this morning, by reprieve, but do ye know that ye are legally dead; that God considers you as such, that in the day when your father Adam touched the fruit, and when you yourselves did sin, God, the Eternal Judge, put on the black cap and condemned you? You talk mightily of your own standing, and goodness, and morality - where is it? Scripture saith, ye are "condemned already." Ye are not to wait to be condemned at the judgment-day - that will be the execution of the sentence - ye are "condemned already." In the moment ye sinned; your names were all written in the black book of justice; every one was then sentenced by God to death, unless he found a substitute, in the person of Christ, for his sins.

What would you think if you were to go into the Old Bailey, and see the condemned culprit sitting in his cell, laughing and merry? You would say, "The man is a fool, for he is condemned, and is to be executed; yet how merry he is." Ah! and how foolish is the worldly man, who, while sentence is recorded against him, lives in merriment and mirth! Do you think the sentence of God is of no effect? Thinkest thou that thy sin which is written with an iron pen on the rocks for ever hath no horrors in it?

God hath said thou art condemned already. If thou wouldst but feel this, it would mingle bitters in thy sweet cups of joy; thy dances would be stopped, thy laughter quenched in sighing, if thou wouldst recollect that thou art condemned already. We ought all to weep, if we lay this to our souls that by nature we have no life in God's sight; we are actually, positively condemned; death is recorded against us, and we are considered in ourselves now, in God's sight, as much dead as if we were actually cast into hell; we are condemned here by sin, we do not yet suffer the penalty of it, but it is written against us, and we are legally dead, nor can we find life unless we find legal life in the person of Christ, of which more by-and-by.

But, besides being legally dead, we are also *spiritually dead.* For not only did the sentence pass in the book, but it passed in the heart; it entered the conscience; it operated on the soul, on the judgment, on the imagination, and on everything. "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," was not only fulfilled by the sentence recorded, but by something which took place in Adam. Just as, in a certain moment, when this body shall die, the blood stops, the pulse ceases, the breath no longer comes from the lungs, so in the day that Adam did eat that fruit his soul died; his imagination lost its mighty power to climb into celestial things and see heaven, his will lost its power always to choose that which is good, his judgment lost all ability to judge between right and wrong decidedly and infallibly, though something was retained in conscience; his memory became tainted, liable to hold evil things, and let righteous things glide away; every power of him ceased as to its moral vitality. Goodness was the vitality of his powers - that departed. Virtue, holiness, integrity, these were the life of man; but when these departed man became dead. And now, every man, so far as spiritual things are concerned, is "dead in trespasses and sins" spiritually. Nor is the soul less dead in a carnal man, than the body is when committed to the grave; it is actually and positively dead - not by a metaphor, for Paul speaketh not in metaphor, when he affirms, "You hath he quickened who *were dead* in trespasses and sins."

But my hearers, again, I would I could preach to your hearts concerning this subject. It was bad enough when I described death as having been recorded; but now I speak of it as having actually taken place in your hearts. Ye are not what ye once were; ye are not what ye were in Adam, not what ye were created. Man was made pure and holy. Ye are not the perfect creatures of which some boast; ye are altogether fallen, ye have gone out of the way, ye have become corrupt and filthy. Oh! listen not to the siren song of those who tell you of your moral dignity, and your mighty elevation in matters of salvation. Ye are not perfect; that great word, "ruin," is written on your heart; and death is stamped upon your spirit.

Do not conceive, O moral man, that thou wilt be able to stand before God in thy morality, for thou art nothing but a carcass embalmed in legality, a corpse arrayed in some fine robes, but still corrupt in God's sight. And think not, O thou possessor of natural religion! that thou mayest by thine own might and power make thyself acceptable to God. Why, man! thou art dead! and thou mayest array the dead as gloriously as thou pleasest, but still it would be a solemn mockery. There lieth queen Cleopatra - put the crown upon her head, deck her in royal robes, let her sit in state; but what a cold chill runs through you when you pass by her. She is fair now, even in her death - but how horrible it is to stand by the side even of a dead queen, celebrated for her majestic beauty! So you may be glorious in your beauty, fair, and amiable, and lovely; you put the crown of honesty upon your head, and wear about you all the garments of uprightness, but unless God has quickened thee, O man! unless the Spirit has had dealings with thy soul, thou art in God's sight as obnoxious as the chilly corpse is to thyself. Thou wouldst not choose to live with a corpse sitting at thy table; nor doth God love that thou shouldst be in his sight. He is angry with thee every day, for thou art in sin - thou art in death. Oh! believe this; take it to thy soul; appropriate it, for it is most true that thou art dead, spiritually as well as legally.

The third kind of death is the consummation of the other two. It is *eternal death.* It is the execution of the legal sentence; it is the consummation of the spiritual death. Eternal death is the death of the soul; it takes place after the body has been laid in the grave, after the soul has departed from it. If legal death be

terrible, it is because of its consequences; and if spiritual death be dreadful, it is because of that which shall succeed it. The two deaths of which we have spoken are the roots, and that death which is to come is the flower thereof.

Oh! had I words that I might this morning attempt to depict to you what eternal death is. The soul has come before its Maker; the book has been opened; the sentence has been uttered; "Depart ye cursed" has shaken the universe, and made the very spheres dim with the frown of the Creator; the soul has departed to the depths where it is to dwell with others in eternal death. Oh! how horrible is its position now. Its bed is a bed of flame; the sights it sees are murdering ones that affright its spirit;. the sounds it hears are shrieks, and wails, and moans, and groans; all that its body knows is the infliction of miserable pain! It has the possession of unutterable woe, of unmitigated misery. The soul looks up. Hope is extinct - it is gone. It looks downward in dread and fear; remorse hath possessed its soul. It looks on the right hand - and the adamantine walls of fate keep it within its limits of torture. It looks on the left - and there the rampart of blazing fire forbids the scaling ladder of e'en a dreamy speculation of escape. It looks within and seeks for consolation there, but a gnawing worm hath entered into the soul. It looks about it - it has no friends to aid, no comforters, but tormentors in abundance. It knoweth nought of hope of deliverance; it hath heard the everlasting key of destiny turning in its awful wards, and it hath seen God take that key and hurl it down into the depth of eternity never to be found again. It hopeth not; it knoweth no escape; it guesseth not of deliverance; it pants for death, but death is too much its foe to be there; it longs that non-existence would swallow it up, but this eternal death is worse than annihilation. It pants for extermination as the laborer for his Sabbath; it longs that it might be swallowed up in nothingness just as would the galley slave long for freedom, but it cometh not - it is eternally dead. When eternity shall have rolled round multitudes of its everlasting cycles it shall still be dead. Forever knoweth no end; eternity cannot be spelled except in eternity. Still the soul seeth written o'er its head, "Thou art damned forever." It heareth howlings that are to be perpetual; it seeth flames which are unquenchable; it knoweth pains that are unmitigated; it hears a sentence that rolls not like the thunder of earth which soon is hushed - but onward, onward, onward, shaking the echoes of eternity - making thousands of years shake again with the horrid thunder of its dreadful sound - "Depart! depart! depart! ye cursed!" This is the eternal death.

II. Secondly, IN CHRIST JESUS THERE IS LIFE, for he says: "Ye will not come to me that *ye might have life."* There is no life in God the Father for a sinner; there is no life in God the Spirit for a sinner apart from Jesus. The life of a sinner is in Christ. If you take the Father apart from the Son, though he loves his elect, and decrees that they shall live, yet life is only in his Son. If you take God the Spirit apart from Jesus Christ, though it is the Spirit that gives us spiritual life, yet it is life in Christ, life in the Son. We dare not, and cannot apply in the first place, either to God the Father, or to God the Holy Ghost for spiritual life. The first thing we are led to do when God brings us out of Egypt is to eat the Passover - the very first thing. The first means whereby we get life is by feeding upon the flesh and blood of the Son of God; living in him, trusting on him, believing in his grace and power. Our second thought was - there is life in Christ. We will show you there are three kinds of life in Christ, as there are three kinds of death.

First there is *legal life* in Christ. Just as every man by nature considered in Adam had a sentence of condemnation passed on him in the moment of Adam's sin, and more especially in the moment of his own first transgression, so I, if I be a believer, and you, if you trust in Christ, have had a legal sentence of acquittal passed on us through what Jesus Christ has done. O condemned sinner! Thou mayest be sitting this morning condemned like the prisoner in Newgate; but ere this day has passed away thou mayest be as clear from guilt as the angels above. There is such a thing as legal life in Christ, and, blessed be God! Some of us enjoy it. We know our sins are pardoned because Christ suffered punishment for them; we know that we never can be punished ourselves, for Christ suffered in our stead. The Passover is slain for us; the lintel and door-post have been sprinkled, and the destroying angel can never touch us. For us there is no hell, although it blaze with terrible flame. Let Tophet be prepared of old, let its pile be wood and much smoke, we never can come there - Christ died for us, in our stead.

What if there be racks of horrid torture? What if there be a sentence producing most horrible reverberations of thundering sounds? Yet neither rack, nor dungeon, nor thunder, are for us! In Christ Jesus we are now delivered. "There is therefore **NOW** no condemnation unto us who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." **S**inner! Art thou legally condemned this morning? Dost thou feel that? Then, let me tell thee that faith in Christ will give thee a knowledge of thy legal acquittal. Beloved, it is no fancy that we are condemned for our sins, it is a reality. So, it is no fancy we are acquitted, it is a reality. A man about to be hanged, if he received a full pardon would feel it a great reality. He would say, "I have a full pardon; I cannot be touched now." That is just how I feel. "Now freed from sin I walk at large,
The Saviour's blood's my full discharge,
At his dear feet content I lay,
A sinner saved, and homage pay."

Brethren, we have gained legal life in Christ, and such legal life that we cannot lose it. The sentence has gone against us once - now it has gone out for us. It is written, "**THERE IS NOW NO CONDEMNATION**," and that *now* will do as well for me in fifty years as it does now. Whatever time we live it will still be written, "There is therefore, *now* no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."

Then, secondly, there is *spiritual life in Christ Jesus.* As the man is spiritually dead, God has spiritual life for him, for there is not a need which is not supplied by Jesus, there is not an emptiness in the heart which Christ cannot fill; there is not a desolation which he cannot people, there is not a desert which he cannot make to blossom as the rose. O ye dead sinners! spiritually dead, there is life in Christ Jesus, for we have seen - yes! these eyes have seen - the dead live again; we have known the man whose soul was utterly corrupt, by the power of God seek after righteousness; we have known the man whose views were carnal, whose lusts were mighty, whose passions were strong, suddenly, by irresistible might from heaven, consecrate himself to Christ, and become a child of Jesus. We know that there is life in Christ Jesus, of a spiritual order; yea, more, we ourselves, in our own persons, have felt that there is spiritual life. Well can we remember when we sat in the house of prayer, as dead as the very seat on which we sat. We had listened for a long, long while to the sound of the gospel, but no effect followed, when suddenly, as if our ears had been opened by the fingers of some mighty angel, a sound entered into our heart. We thought we heard Jesus saying, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." An irresistible hand put itself on our heart and crushed a prayer out of it. We never had a prayer before like that. We cried, "O God! have mercy upon me a sinner."

Some of us for months felt a hand pressing us as if we had been grasped in a vice, and our souls bled drops of anguish. That misery was a sign of coming life. Persons when they are being drowned do not feel the pain so much as while they are being restored. Oh! we recollect those pains, those groans, that living strife that our soul had when it came to Christ. Ah! we can recollect the giving of our spiritual life as easily as could a man his restoration from the grave. We can suppose Lazarus to have remembered his resurrection, though not all the circumstances of it. So we, although we have forgotten a great deal, do recollect our giving ourselves to Christ. We can say to every sinner, however dead, there is life in Christ Jesus, though you may be rotten and corrupt in your grave. He who hath raised Lazarus hath raised us; and he can say, even to you, "Lazarus! come forth."

In the third place, there is *eternal life* in Christ Jesus. And, oh! if eternal death be terrible, eternal life is blessed; for he has said, "Where I am there shall my people be." "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given unto me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish." Now, any Arminian that would preach from that text must buy a pair of India rubber lips, for I am sure he would need to stretch his mouth amazingly; he would never be able to speak the whole truth without winding about in a most mysterious manner. Eternal life - not a

life which they are to lose, but eternal life. If I lost life in Adam I gained it in Christ; if I lost myself for ever I find myself for ever in Jesus Christ. Eternal life! Oh blessed thought! Our eyes will sparkle with joy and our souls bum with ecstasy in the thought that we have eternal life. Be quenched ye stars! let God put his finger on you - but my soul will live in bliss and joy. Put out thine eye O sun! - but mine eye shall "see the king in his beauty" when thine eye shall no more make the green earth laugh. And moon, be thou turned into blood! but my blood shall ne'er be turned to nothingness; this spirit shall exist when thou hast ceased to be. And thou great world! thou mayest all subside, just as a moment's foam subsides upon the wave that bears it - but I have eternal life. O time! thou mayest see giant mountains dead and hidden in their graves; thou mayest see the stars like figs too ripe, falling from the tree, but thou shalt never, never see my spirit dead.

III. This brings us to the third point: that ETERNAL LIFE IS GIVEN TO ALL WHO COME FOR IT.

There never was a man who came to Christ for eternal life, for legal life, for spiritual life, who had not already received it, in some sense, and it was manifested to him that he had received it soon after he came. Let us take one or two texts - "He is able to save to the uttermost them that *come* unto him." Every man who comes to Christ will find that Christ is able to save him - not able to save him a little, to deliver him from a little sin, to keep him from a little trial, to carry him a little way and then drop him - but able to save him to the uttermost extent of his sin, unto the uttermost length of his trials, the uttermost depths of his sorrows, unto the uttermost duration of his existence. Christ says to every one who comes to him, "Come, poor sinner, thou needst not ask whether I have power to save. I will not ask thee how far thou hast gone into sin; I am able to save thee to the uttermost." And there is no one on earth can go beyond God's "uttermost."

Now another text: "Him that *cometh* to me, [mark the promises are nearly always to the coming ones] I will in no wise cast out." Every man that comes shall find the door of Christ's house opened - and the door of his heart too. Every man that comes - I say it in the broadest sense - shall find that Christ has mercy for him. The greatest absurdity in the world is to want to have a wider gospel than that recorded in Scripture. I preach that every man who believes shall be saved - that every man who comes shall find mercy. People ask me, "But suppose a man should come who was not chosen, would he be saved?" You go and suppose nonsense and I am not going to give you an answer. If a man is not chosen he will never come. When he does come it is a sure proof that he was chosen.

Says one, "Suppose any one should go to Christ who had not been called of the Spirit." Stop, my brother, that is a supposition thou hast no right to make, for such a thing cannot happen; you only say it to entangle me, and you will not do that just yet. I say every man who comes to Christ shall be saved. I can say that as a Calvinist, or as a hyper-Calvinist, as plainly as you can say it. I have no narrower gospel than you have; only my gospel is on a solid foundation, whereas yours is built upon nothing but sand and rottenness. "Every man that cometh shall be saved, for no man cometh to me except the Father draw him." "But," says one, "suppose all the world should come, would Christ receive them?" Certainly, if all came; but then they won't come. I tell you *all that come* - aye, if they were as bad as devils, Christ would receive them; if they had all sin and filthiness running into their hearts as into a common sewer for the whole world, Christ would receive them. Another says, "I want to know about the rest of the people. May I go out and tell them - Jesus Christ died for every one of you? May I say - there is righteousness for everyone of you, there is life for every one of you?" No; you may not. You may say - there is life for every man that comes. But if you say there is life for one of those that do not believe, you utter a dangerous lie. If you tell them Jesus Christ was punished for their sins, and yet they will be lost, you tell a willful falsehood. To think that God could punish Christ and then punish them - I wonder at your daring to have the impudence to say so! A good man was once preaching that there were harps and crowns in heaven for all his congregation; and then he wound up in a most solemn manner: "My dear friends, there are many for whom these things are prepared who will not get there." In fact, he made

such a pitiful tale, as indeed he might do; but I tell you who he ought to have wept for - he ought to have wept for the angels of heaven and all the saints, because that would spoil heaven thoroughly. You know when you meet at Christmas, if you have lost your brother David and his seat is empty, you say: "Well, we always enjoyed Christmas, but there is a drawback to it now - poor David is dead and buried!" Think of the angels saying: "Ah! this is a beautiful heaven, but we don't like to see all those crowns up there with cobwebs on; we cannot endure that uninhabited street: we cannot behold yon empty thrones." And then, poor souls, they might begin talking to one another, and say, "we are none of us safe here for the promise was - "I give unto my sheep eternal life," and there is a lot of them in hell that God gave eternal life to; there is a number that Christ shed his blood for burning in the pit, and if they may be sent there, so may we. If we cannot trust one promise we cannot another." So heaven would lose its foundation, and fall. Away with your nonsensical gospel! God gives us a safe and solid one, built on covenant doings and covenant relationship, on eternal purposes and sure fulfillments.

IV. This brings us to the fourth point, THAT BY NATURE NO MAN WILL COME TO CHRIST, for the text says, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." I assert on Scripture authority from my text, that ye will not come unto Christ, that ye might have life. I tell you, I might preach to you for ever, I might borrow the eloquence of Demosthenes or of Cicero, but ye will not come unto Christ. I might beg of you on my knees, with tears in my eyes, and show you the horrors of hell and the joys of heaven, the sufficiency of Christ, and your own lost condition, but you would none of you come unto Christ of yourselves unless the Spirit that rested on Christ should draw you. It is true of all men in their natural condition that they *will not* come unto Christ. But, methinks I hear another of these babblers asking a question: "But could they not come if they liked?" My friend, I will reply to thee another time. That is not the question this morning. I am talking about whether they *will,* not whether they *can.* You will notice whenever you talk about free-will, the poor Arminian, in two seconds begins to talk about power, and he mixes up two subjects that should be kept apart. We will not take two subjects at once; we decline fighting two at the same time, if you please. Another day we will preach from this text - "No man *can* come except the Father draw him." But it is only the will we are talking of now; and it is certain that men will not come unto Christ, that they might have life. **W**e might prove this from many texts of Scripture, but we will take one parable. You remember the parable where a certain king had a feast for his son, and bade a great number to come; the oxen and fatlings were killed, and he sent his messengers bidding many to the supper. Did they go to the feast? Ah, no; but they all, with one accord, began to make excuse. One said he had married a wife, and therefore he could not come, whereas he might have brought her with him. Another had bought a yoke of oxen, and went to prove them; but the feast was in the night-time, and he could not prove his oxen in the dark. Another had bought a piece of land, and wanted to see it; but I should not think he went to see it with a lantern. So they all made excuses and would not come. Well the king was determined to have the feast; so he said, "Go out into the highways and hedges, and" invite them - stop! not *invite* -"*compel* them to come in;" for even the ragged fellows in the hedges would never have come unless they were compelled.

Take another parable: A certain man had a vineyard; at the appointed season he sent one of his servants for his rent. What did they do to him? They beat that servant. He sent another; and they stoned him. He sent another and they killed him. And, at last, he said, "I will send them my son, they will reverence him." But what did they do? They said, "This is the heir, let us kill him, and cast him out of the vineyard." So they did. It is the same with all men by nature. The Son of God came, yet men rejected him. "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life." It would take too much time to mention any more Scripture proofs. We will, however, refer to the great doctrine of the fall. Any one who believes that man's will is entirely free, and that he can be saved by it, does not believe the fall. As I sometimes tell you, few preachers of religion do believe thoroughly the doctrine of the fall, or else they think that when Adam fell down he broke his little finger, and did not break his neck and ruin his race. Why, beloved, the fall broke man up entirely. It did not leave one power unimpaired; they were all shattered, and debased, and tarnished; like some mighty temple, the pillars might be there, the shaft, and the column,

and the pilaster might be there; but they were all broken, though some of them retain their form and position. The conscience of man sometimes retains much of its tenderness - still it has fallen. The will, too, is not exempt. What though it is "the Lord Mayor of Mansoul," as Bunyan calls it? the Lord Mayor goes wrong. The Lord Will-be-will was continually doing wrong. Your fallen nature was put out of order; your will, amongst other things, has clean gone astray from God. But I tell you what will be the best proof of that; it is the great fact that you never did meet a Christian in your life who ever said he came to Christ without Christ coming to him.

You have heard a great many Arminian sermons, I dare say; but you never heard an Arminian prayer - for the saints in prayer appear as one in word, and deed and mind. An Arminian on his knees would pray desperately like a Calvinist. He cannot pray about free-will: there is no room for it. Fancy him praying:

"Lord, *I thank thee I am not like those poor presumptuous Calvinists. Lord, I was born with a glorious free-will; I was born with power by which I can turn to thee of myself; I have improved my grace. If everybody had done the same with their grace that I have, they might all have been saved. Lord, I know thou dost not make us willing if we are not willing ourselves. Thou givest grace to everybody; some do not improve it, but I do. There are many that will go to hell as much bought with the blood of Christ as I was; they had as much of the Holy Ghost given to them; they had as good a chance, and were as much blessed as I am. It was not thy grace that made us to differ; I know it did a great deal, still I turned the point; I made use of what was given me, and others did not - that is the difference between me and them."*

That is a prayer for the devil, for nobody else would offer such a prayer as that. Ah! when they are preaching and talking very slowly, there may be wrong doctrine; but when they come to pray, the true thing slips out; they cannot help it. If a man talks very slowly, he may speak in a fine manner; but when he comes to talk fast, the old brogue of his country, where he was born, slips out. I ask you again, did you ever meet a Christian man who said, "I came to Christ without the power of the Spirit?" If you ever did meet such a man, you need have no hesitation in saying, "My dear sir, I quite believe it - and I believe you went away again without the power of the Spirit, and that you know nothing about the matter, and are in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity." Do I hear one Christian man saying, "I sought Jesus before he sought me; I went to the Spirit, and the Spirit did not come to me"? No, beloved; we are obliged, each one of us, to put our hands to our hearts and say:

"Grace taught my soul to pray,
And made my eyes to o'erflow;
'Twas grace that kept me to this day,
And will not let me go."

Is there one here - a solitary one - man or woman, young or old, who can say, "I sought God before he sought me?" No; even you who are a little Arminian, will sing:

"O yes! I do love Jesus - Because he first loved me."

Then, one more question. Do we not find, even after we have come to Christ, our soul is not free, but is kept by Christ? Do we not find times, even now, when to will is not present with us? There is a law in our members, warring against the law of our minds. Now, if those who are spiritually alive feel that their will is contrary to God, what shall we say of the man who is "dead in trespasses and sins"? It would be a marvelous absurdity to put the two on a level; and it would be still more absurd to put the dead before the living. No; the text is true, experience has branded it into our hearts. "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life."

Now, we must tell you the reasons why men will not come unto Christ. The first is, because no man by nature thinks he wants Christ. By nature man conceives that he does not need Christ; he thinks that he has a robe of righteousness of his own, that he is well-dressed, that he is not naked, that he needs not Christ's blood to wash him, that he is not black or crimson, and needs no grace to purify him. No man knows his need until God shows it to him; and until the Holy Spirit reveals the necessity of pardon, no man will seek pardon. I may preach Christ for ever, but unless you feel you want Christ you will never come to him. A doctor may have a good shop, but nobody will buy his medicines until he feels he wants them.

The next reason is, because men do not like Christ's way of saving them. One says, "I do not like it because he makes me holy; I cannot drink or swear if he saved me." Another says, "It requires me to be so precise and puritanical, and I like a little more license." Another does not like it because it is so humbling; he does not like it because the "gate of heaven" is not quite high enough for his head, and he does not like stooping. That is the chief reason ye will not come to Christ, because ye cannot get to him with your heads straight up in the air; for Christ makes you stoop when you come. Another does not like it to be grace from first to last. "Oh!" he says, "If I might have a little honor." But when he hears it is all Christ or no Christ, a whole Christ or no Christ, he says, "I shall not come," and turns on his heel and goes away. Ah! proud sinners, ye *will not* come unto Christ. Ah! ignorant sinners, ye *will not* come unto Christ, because ye know nothing of him. And that is the third reason.

Men do not know his worth, for if they did they would come unto him. Why did not sailors go to America before Columbus went? Because they did not believe there was an America. Columbus had faith, therefore he went. He who hath faith in Christ goes to him. But you don't know Jesus; many of you never saw his beauteous face; you never saw how applicable his blood is to a sinner, how great is his atonement; and how all-sufficient are his merits. Therefore, "ye will not come to him." **A**nd oh! my hearers, my last thought is a solemn one. I have preached that ye will not come. But some will say, "it is their sin that they do not come." **IT IS SO.**

You will not come, but then your will is a sinful will. Some think that we "sew pillows to all armholes" when we preach this doctrine, but we don't. We do not set this down as being part of man's original nature, but as belonging to his *fallen* nature. It is sin that has brought you into this condition that you will not come. If you had not fallen, you would come to Christ the moment he was preached to you; but you do not come because of your sinfulness and crime. People excuse themselves because they have bad hearts. That is the most flimsy excuse in the world. Do not robbery and thieving come from a bad heart? Suppose a thief should say to a judge, "I could not help it, I had a bad heart." What would the judge say? "You rascal! why, if your *heart* is bad, I'll make the sentence heavier, for you are a villain indeed. Your excuse is nothing." The Almighty shall "laugh at them, and shall have them in derision." We do not preach this doctrine to excuse you, but to humble you. The possession of a bad nature is my fault as well as my terrible calamity. It is a sin that will always be charged on men; when they will not come unto Christ it is sin that keeps them away. He who does not preach that, I fear is not faithful to God and his conscience. Go home, then, with this thought; "I am by nature so perverse that I will not come unto Christ, and that wicked perversity of my nature is my sin. I deserve to be sent to hell for it." And if the thought does not humble you, the Spirit using it, no other can. This morning I have not preached human nature up, but I have preached it down. God humble us all. Amen.

Salvation Is Of God

by James Riscinti

Here were consider Scripture passages that lead people astray, especially those who don't know Christ or who have not studied to show themselves approved, workmen rightly dividing the word of Truth.

It Seems To Be Of Us ... But It is Really Of God!		
"Receive"	**It seems to be of us...** John 1:12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, [even] to them that believe on his name:	**but it is really of God!...** John 3:27 John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.
"Believe" & "Faith"	**It seems to be of us...** Acts 16:31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. Mark 11:22 And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God.	**but it is really of God!...** John 6:29 Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent. Acts 13:48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. Philippians 1:29 For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake;
"Come"	**It seems to be of us...** John 6:37 All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.	**but it is really of God!...** John 6:44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. Psalms 65:4 Blessed [is the man whom] thou choosest, and causest to approach [unto thee, that] he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, [even] of thy holy temple.
"Repent"	**It seems to be of us...** 2Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.	**but it is really of God!...** 2Timothy 2:25 In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; Acts 5:31 Him hath God exalted with his right hand [to be] a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. Romans 3:27,28 Where [is] boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. Eph. 2:8,9 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: [it is] the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.
To God Be The Glory!		

Election Or Atheism - No Middle Ground

by Don Fortner

"So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."

Romans 9:16-18

If you receive the Bible as the Word of God, you have no choice, you must believe the doctrine of election. If you believe the Bible, you have to take it all as the Word of God. You cannot say, "I believe what the Bible teaches about heaven; but I just cannot accept the idea of hell." You cannot say, "I believe in God; but I simply cannot believe in election." Election is so much a part of divine truth that it cannot be expunged from the Book of God without completely destroying the Word of God. It is taught in Genesis, in Revelation, and everywhere between. TO DENY THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION IS TO DENY THE WORD OF GOD, REJECT THE RELIGION OF JESUS CHRIST, AND TO ENGAGE IN THE PRACTICE OF UTTER ATHEISM; FOR THE DENIAL OF ELECTION IS THE DENIAL OF THE GOD OF ELECTION!

Yes, you read that right. I said the denial of election is a denial of God! It is A DENIAL OF HIS SOVEREIGNTY. It denies that God has the right to do with his own what he will. Those who deny election deny God's government of the world and his right to govern. It is also A DENIAL OF GOD'S JUSTICE. Those who deny election say that God has no right to punish the wicked. They would oblige God to save. If you deny election, you make your will, not God's will, the overriding, governing principle. Your denial of election asserts that men's will governs the universe, not God's. You would tear down the walls of heaven, break the scepter of righteousness, throw the Almighty off his throne, and elevate yourself to the lofty position of utter supremacy!

A denial of sovereign election is AN UTTER DENIAL OF GOD. Those who do so may call themselves Christians; but they practice atheism. A god whose hands are tied is no God at all. A god who cannot exercise a sovereign prerogative to have mercy on whom he will, is no God. Such a pigmy god is smaller and less significant than the Governor of the State of Kentucky who can pardon and refuse to pardon whom he will. A god without election is a god without a throne, a god without purpose, a god without reverence, and NO GOD AT ALL!

Objections to God's Sovereignty Answered

by Arthur W. Pink

One of the most popular beliefs of the day is that God loves everybody, and the very fact that it is so popular with all classes ought to be enough to arouse the suspicious of those who are subject to the Word of Truth. God's love toward all His creatures is the fundamental and favorite tenet of Universalists, Unitarians, Theosophists, Christian Scientists, Spiritualists, Russellites, etc. No matter how a man may live -- in open defiance of Heaven, with no concern whatever for his soul's eternal interests, still less for God's glory, dying, perhaps with an oath on his lips -- notwithstanding, God loves

him, we are told. So widely has this dogma been proclaimed, and so comforting is it to the heart which is at enmity with God, we have little hope of convincing many of their error. That God loves everybody, is, we may say, quite a modern belief. The writings of the church fathers, the Reformers or the Puritans will (we believe) be searched in vain for any such concept. Perhaps the late D.L. Moody -- Captivated by Drummond's "The Greatest Thing in the World" -- did more than anyone else in the last century to popularize this concept.

It has been customary to say God loves the sinner though He hates his sin. But that is a meaningless distinction. What is there in a sinner but sin? Is it not true that his "whole head is sick" and his "whole heart faint," and that "from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness" in him? (Isa. 1:5,6) Is it true that God loves the one who is despising and rejecting His blessed Son? God is Light as well as Love, and therefore His love must be a holy love. To tell the Christ-rejecter that God loves him is to cauterize his conscience as well as to afford him a sense of security in his sins. The fact is, the love of God is a truth for the saints only, and to present it to the enemies of God is to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs. With the exception of John 3:16, not once in the four Gospels do we read of the Lord Jesus, the perfect Teacher, telling sinners that God loves them! In the book of Acts, which records the evangelistic labors and messages of the apostles, God's love is never referred to at all! But when we come to the Epistles, which are addressed to the saints, we have a full presentation of this precious truth -- God's love for His own. Let us seek to rightly divide the Word of God and then we shall not be found taking truths which are addressed to believers and mis-applying them to unbelievers. That which sinners need to have brought before them is the ineffable holiness, the exacting wrath of God. Risking the danger of being misunderstood let us say -- and we wish we could say it to every evangelist and preacher in the country -- there is far too much presenting of Christ to sinners today (by those sound in the faith), and far too little showing sinners their need of Christ, i.e., their absolutely ruined and lost condition, their imminent and awful danger of suffering the wrath to come, the fearful guilt resting upon them in the sight of God: to present Christ to those who have never been shown their need of Him, seems to us to be guilty of casting pearls before swine.

If it be true that God loves every member of the human family, then why did our Lord tell His disciples "He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father ... If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him." (John 14:21,23)? Why say "he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father"? If the Father loves everybody? The same limitation is found in Prov. 8:17: "I love tem that love Me." Again we read, "Thou hatest all workers of iniquity" -- not merely the works of iniquity. Here then is a flat repudiation of present teaching that, God hates sin but loves the sinner; Scripture says, "Thou hatest all workers of iniquity" (Psa. 5:5)! "God is angry with the wicked every day." (Psa. 7:11) "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God" -- not "shall abide," but even now -- "abideth on him." (John 3:36) Can God "love" the one on whom His "wrath" abides? Again, is it not evident that the words, "The love of God which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:39) marks a limitation, both in the sphere and objects of His love? Again, is it not plain from the words "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (Rom. 9:13) that God does not love everybody? Again, it is written, "For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." (Heb. 12:6) Does not this verse teach that God's love is restricted to the members of His own family? If He loves all men without exception, then the distinction and limitation here mentioned is quite meaningless. Finally, we would ask, Is it conceivable that God will love the damned in the Lake of Fire? Yet, if He loves them now He will do so then, seeing that His love knows no change -- He is "without variableness or shadow of turning"!

Turning now to John 3:16, it should be evident from the passages just quoted that this verse will not bear the construction usually put upon it, "God so loved the world." Many suppose that this means the entire human race. But "the entire human race" includes all mankind from Adam till the close of earth's history; it reaches backward as well as forward! Consider, then, the history of mankind before Christ

was born. Unnumbered millions lived and died before the Savior came to the earth, lived here "having no hope and without God in the world," and therefore passed out into an eternity of woe. If God "loved" them, where is the slightest proof thereof? Scripture declares "Who (God) in times past (from the tower of Babel till after Pentecost) suffered all nations to walk in their own ways." (Acts 14:16) Scripture declares that "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient." (Rom. 1:28) To Israel God said, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." (Amos 3:2) In view of these plain passages who will be so foolish as to insist that God in the past loved all mankind! The same applies with equal force to the future. Read through the book of Revelation, noting especially chapters 8 to 19, where we have described the judgments which will be poured out from Heaven on this earth. Read of the fearful woes, the frightful plagues, the vials of God's wrath, which shall be emptied on the wicked. Finally, read the twentieth chapter of Revelation, the great white throne judgment, and see if you can discover there the slightest trace of love.

But the objector comes back to John 3:16 and says, "World means world." True, but we have shown that "the world" does not mean the whole human family. The fact is that "the world" is used in a general way. When the brethren of Christ said "Show thyself to the world" (John 7:4), did they mean "Shew Thyself to all mankind"? When the Pharisees said "Behold, the world is gone after Him" (John 12:19), did they mean that "all the human family" were flocking after Him? When the apostle wrote, "Your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world" (Rom. 1:8), did he mean that the faith of the saints at Rome was the subject of conversation by every man, woman, and child on earth? When Rev. 13:3 informs us that "all the world wondered after the beast," are we to understand that there will be no exceptions? These, and other passages which might be quoted, show that the term "the world" often has a relative rather than an absolute force.

Now the first thing to note in connection with John 3:16 is that our Lord was there speaking to Nicotinic, a man who believed that God's mercies were confined to his own nation. Christ there announced that God's love in giving His Son had a larger object in view, that it flowed beyond the boundary of Palestine, reaching out to "regions beyond." In other words, this was Christ's announcement that God had a purpose of grace toward Gentiles as well as Jews. "God so loved the world," then, signifies God's love is international in its scope. But does this mean that God loves every individual among the Gentiles? Not necessarily, for as we have seen, the term "world" is general rather than specific, relative rather than absolute. The term "world" in itself is not conclusive. To ascertain who are the objects of God's love, other passages where His love is mentioned must be consulted.

In 2 Peter 2:5 we read of "the world of the ungodly." If then, there is a world of the ungodly, there must also be a world of the godly. It is the latter who are in view in the passages we shall now briefly consider. "For the bread of God is He which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world." (John 6:33) Now mark it well, Christ did not say, "offereth life unto the world," but "giveth." What is the difference between the two terms? This: a thing which is "offered" may be refused, but a thing "given," necessarily implies its acceptance. If it is not accepted, it is not "given," it is simply proffered. Here, then, is a Scripture that positively states Christ giveth life (spiritual, eternal life) "unto the world." Now He does not give eternal life the "world of the ungodly" for they will not have it, they do not want it. Hence, we are obliged to understand the reference in John 6:33 as being to "the world of the godly," i.e., God's own people.

One more: In 2 Cor. 5:19 we read, "To wit that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." What is meant by this is clearly defined in the words immediately following, "not imputing their trespasses unto them." Here again "the world" cannot mean "the world of the ungodly," for their "trespasses" are "imputed" to them, as the judgment of the Great White Throne will yet show. But 2 Cor. 5:19 plainly teaches there is a "world" which is "reconciled," reconciled unto God because their

trespasses are not reckoned to their account, having been borne by their Substitute. Who then are they? Only one answer is fairly possible -- the world of God's people!

In life manner, the "world" in John 3:16 must, in the final analysis refer to the world of God's people. Must, we say, for there is no other alternative solution. It cannot mean the whole human race, for one-half of the race was already in hell when Christ came to earth. It is unfair to insist that it means every human being now living, for every other passage in the New Testament where God's love is mentioned, limits it to His own people -- search and see! The objects of God's love in John 3:16 are precisely the same as the objects of Christ's love in John 13:1: "Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His time was come, that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world. He loved them unto the end." We may admit that our interpretation of John 3:16 is no novel one invented by us, but one almost uniformly given by the Reformers and Puritans, and many others since then.

It is strange, yet it is true, that many who acknowledge the sovereign rule of God over material things will cavil and quibble when we insist that God is also sovereign in the spiritual realm. But their quarrel is with God and not with us. We have given Scripture in support of everything advanced in these pages, and if that will not satisfy our readers, it is idle for us to seek to convince them. What we write now is designed for those who do bow to the authority of Holy Writ, and for their benefit we propose to examine several other Scriptures which have purposely been held for this chapter.

Perhaps the one passage which has presented the greatest difficulty to those who have seen that passage after passage in Holy Writ plainly teaches the election of a limited number unto salvation, is 2 Peter 3:9: "Not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

The first thing to be said upon the above passage is that, like all other Scripture, it must be understood and interpreted in the light of its context. What we have quoted in the preceding paragraph is only part of the verse, and the last part of it at that! Surely it must be allowed by all that the first half of the verse needs to be taken into consideration. In order to establish what these words are supposed by many to mean, viz., that the words "any" and "all" are to be received without any qualification, it must be shown that the context is referring to the whole human race! If this cannot be shown, if there is no premise to justify this, then the conclusion also must be unwarranted. Let us then ponder the first part of the verse.

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise."

Note "promise" in the singular number, not "promises." What promise is in view? The promise of salvation? Where, in all Scripture, has God ever promised to save the whole human race! Where indeed? No, the "promise" here referred to, is not about salvation. What then is it? The context tells us.

"Knowing this, first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming?" (vv. 3,4) The context then refers to God's promise to send back His beloved Son. But many long centuries have passed and this promise has not yet been fulfilled. True, but long as the delay may seem to us, the interval is short in the reckoning of God. As the proof of this we are reminded, "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." (v. 8) In God's reckoning of time, less than two days have yet passed since He promised to send back Christ.

But more, the delay in the Father's sending back His beloved Son is not only due to no "slackness" on His part, but it is also occasioned by His "longsuffering." His longsuffering to whom? The verse we are now considering tells us: "but is longsuffering to usward." And who are the "usward"? -- the human

race, or God's own people? In the light of the context this is not an open question upon which each of us is free to form an opinion. The Holy Spirit has defined it. The opening verse of the chapter says, "This second Epistle, beloved, I now write unto you." And again, the verse immediately preceding declares, "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing," etc. (v. 8) The "usward" then are the "beloved" of God. They to whom his Epistle is addressed are "them that have obtained (not "exercised," but "obtained" as God's sovereign gift) like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 1:11) Therefore we say there is no room for a doubt, a quibble or an argument -- the "usward" are the elect of God.

Let us now quote the verse as a whole: "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Could anything be clearer? The "any" that God is not willing should perish are the "usward" to who God is "longsuffering," the "beloved" of the previous verses. 2 Peter 3:9 means, then, that God will not send back His Son until "the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." (Rom. 11:25) God will not send back Christ till that "people" whom He is now "taking out of the Gentiles" (Acts 15:14) are gathered in. God will not send back His Son till the Body of Christ is complete, and that will not be till the ones whom He has elected to be saved in this dispensation shall have been brought to Him. Thank God for His "longsuffering to usward." Had Christ come back twenty years ago the writer had been justify behind to perish in his sins. But that could not be, so God graciously delayed the Second Coming. For the same reason He is still delaying His advent. His decreed purpose is that all His elect will come to repentance, and repent they shall. The present interval of grace will not end until the last of the "other sheep" of John 10:16 are safely folded -- then will Christ return.

In expounding the sovereignty of God the Spirit in Salvation we have shown that His power is irresistible, that, by His gracious operations upon; and within them He "compels" God's elect to come to Christ. The sovereignty of the Holy Spirit is set forth not only in John 3:8 where we are told "The wind bloweth where it pleaseth ... so is every one that is born of the Spirit," but is affirmed in other passages as well. In 1 Cor. 12:11 we read, "But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will." And again, we read in Acts 16:6,7: "Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Spirit to preach the Word in Asia. After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go to Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not." Thus we see how the Holy Spirit interposes His imperial will in opposition to the determination of the apostles.

But, it is objected against the assertion that the will and power of the Holy Spirit are irresistible, that there are two passages, one in the Old Testament and the other in the New, which appear to militate against such a conclusion. God said of old "My Spirit shall not always strive with man" (Gen. 6:3), and to the Jews Stephen declared, "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" (Acts 7:51,52) If then the Jews "resisted" the Holy Spirit, how can we say His power is irresistible? The answer is found in Neh. 9:30, "Many years didst thou forbear them, and testifieth against them by Thy Spirit, in Thy prophets: yet would they not give ear." It was the external operations of the Spirit which Israel "resisted." It was the Spirit speaking by and through the prophets to which they "would not give ear." It was not anything which the Holy Spirit wrought in them that they "resisted" but the motives presented to them by the inspired messages of the prophets. Perhaps it will help the reader to catch our thought better if we compare Matt. 11:20-24: "Then began He to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not. Woe unto thee Chorazin," etc. Our Lord here pronounces woe upon these cities for their failure to repent because of the "mighty works" (miracles) which He had done in their sight, and not because of any internal operations of His grace! The same is true of Gen. 6:3. By comparing 1 Peter 3:18-20 it will be seen that it was by and through Noah that God's Spirit "strove" with the antediluvians. the distinction noted above was ably

summarized by Andrew Fuller (another writer long deceased from whom our moderns might learn much) thus: "There are two kinds of influences by which God works on the minds of men. First, that which is common, and which is effected by the ordinary use of motives presented to the mind for consideration: Secondly, that which is special and supernatural. The one contains nothing mysterious, anymore than the influence of our words and actions on each other; the other is such a mystery that we know nothing of it but by its effects. The former ought to be effectual; the latter is so." The work of the Holy Spirit upon or towards men is always "resisted" by them; His work within is always successful. What saith the Scriptures? This: "He which hath begun a good work IN you, will finish it." (Phil. 1:6)

The next question to be considered is: Why preach the Gospel to every creature? If God the Father has predestined only a limited number to be saved, if God the Son died to effect the salvation of only those given to Him by the Father, and if God the Spirit is seeking to quicken none save God's elect, then what is the use of giving the Gospel to the world at large, and where is the propriety of telling sinners that "Whosoever believeth in Christ shall not perish but have everlasting life"?

First, it is of great importance that we should be clear upon the nature of the Gospel itself. The Gospel is God's good news concerning Christ and not concerning sinners: "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God ... concerning His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom. 1:1,3) God would have proclaimed far and wide the amazing fact that His own blessed Son "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." A universal testimony must be borne to the matchless worth of the person and work of Christ. Note the word "witness" in Matt. 24:14. The Gospel is God's "witness" unto the perfections of His Son. Mark the words of the apostle: "For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, them that are saved, and in them that perish"! (2 Cor. 2:15)

Concerning the character and contents of the Gospel, the utmost confusion prevails today. The Gospel is not an "offer" to be bandied around by evangelical peddlers. The Gospel is no mere invitation, but a proclamation concerning Christ; true whether men believe it or not. No man is asked to believe that Christ died for him in particular. The Gospel, in brief, is this: Christ died for sinners, you are a sinner, believe in Christ, and you shall be saved. In the Gospel, God simply announced the terms which men may be saved (namely, repentance and faith) and, indiscriminately, all are commanded to fulfill them.

Second, repentance and remission of sins are to be preached in the name of the Lord Jesus "unto all the nations" (Luke 24:47), because God's elect are "scattered abroad" (John 11:52) among all nations, and it is by the preaching and hearing of the Gospel that they are called out of the world. The Gospel is the means which God uses in the saving of His own chosen ones. By nature God's elect are children of wrath "even as others"; they are lost sinners needing a Savior, and apart from Christ there is no solution for them. Hence, the Gospel must be believed by them before they can rejoice in the knowledge of sins forgiven. The Gospel is God's winnowing: it separates the chaff from the wheat, and gathers the latter into His garner.

Third, it is to be noted that God has other purposes in the preaching of the Gospel than the salvation of His own elect. The world exists for the elect's sake yet others have the benefit of it. So the Word is preached for the elect's sake yet others have the benefit of an external call. The sun shines though blind men see it not. The rain falls upon rocky mountains and waste deserts as well as on the fruitful valleys; so also, God suffers the Gospel to fall on the ears of the non-elect. The power of the Gospel is one of God's agencies for holding in check the wickedness of the world. Many who are never saved by it are reformed, their lusts are bridled, and they are restrained from becoming worse. Moreover, the preaching of the Gospel to the non-elect is made an admirable test of their characters. It exhibits the inveteracy of their sin; it demonstrates that their hearts are enmity against God; it justified the declaration of Christ that "men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." (John 3:19)

Finally, it is sufficient for us to know that we are bidden to preach the Gospel to every creature. It is not for us to reason about the consistency between this and the fact that "few are chosen." It is for us to obey. It is a simple matter to ask questions relating to the ways of God which no finite mind can fully fathom. We, too, might turn and remind the objector that our Lord declared, "Verily, I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme. But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness" (Mark 3:28,29), and there can be no doubt whatever but that certain of the Jews were guilty of this very sin (see Matt. 12:24, etc.) and hence their destruction was inevitable. Yet, notwithstanding, scarcely two months later, He commanded His disciples to preach the Gospel to every creature. When the objector can show us the consistency of these two things -- the fact that certain of the Jews had committed the sin for which there is never forgiveness, and the fact that to them the Gospel was to be preached -- we will undertake to furnish a more satisfactory solution than the one given above to the harmony between a universal proclamation of the Gospel and a limitation of its saving power to those only that God has predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.

Once more, we say, it is not for us to reason about the Gospel; it is our business to preach it. When God ordered Abraham to offer up his son as a burnt offering, he might have objected that this command was inconsistent with His promise, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." But instead of arguing be obeyed, and justify God to harmonize His promise and His precept. Jeremiah might have argued that God had bade him to do that which was altogether unreasonable when He said, "Therefore thou shalt speak all these words unto them; but they will not hearken to thee; thou shalt also call unto them; but they will not answer thee" (Jer. 7:27), but instead, the prophet obeyed. Ezekiel too, might have complained that the Lord was asking of him a hard thing when He said, "Son of man, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them. For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of an hard language, but to the house of Israel; Not to many people of a strange speech and of a hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee. But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me; for all the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted." (Ezek. 3:4-7)

"But, O my soul, if truth so bright
Should dazzle and confound thy sight,
Yet, still His written Word obey,
And wait the great decision day." -- Watts

It has been well said, "The Gospel has lost none of its ancient power. It is, as much today as when it was first preached, 'the power of God unto salvation.' It needs no pity, no help, and no handmaid. It can overcome all obstacles, and break down all barriers. No human device need be tried to prepare the sinner to receive it, for if God has sent it no power can hinder it; and if He has not sent it, no power can make it effectual." -- (Dr. Bullinger)

"Accepting Christ"
by I. C. Herendeen

In an effort to get sinners saved we often hear them exhorted to "accept Christ as their personal Saviour" as though those who are slaves of Satan and captives of the Devil could do so and be saved if they did so. But this is utterly foreign to Holy Scripture; there is no foundation in Holy Writ for it. It presents a false way of salvation, and therefore should be discarded along with other similar expressions such as "Give your heart to Jesus," "Take Jesus as your Saviour," etc. Such expressions fail to take into

consideration the plain and sad fact that man is a fallen creature (Rom 3:23), "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God" (Ephesians 4: 18) with a heart stubbornly steeled against Him so that he "will not" come to Christ (John 5:40) unless and until Divine power overcomes his innate enmity and makes him willing to come that he "might have life" (John 10:10). By nature the sinner's "carnal mind" is "enmity against God" (Romans 8:7) so that naught but Divine power operating within him can overcome this enmity. The salvation of any sinner is a matter of "the operation of God" (Colossians 2:12).

A spiritual kingdom requires a spiritual nature, and in order to the acquisition of that the natural man must be regenerated, Divinely regenerated, for the creature can no more quicken himself than he can give himself a natural being, Why not? Because regeneration is no mere outward reformation, process of education, or even religious cultivation. No, it consists of a radical change of heart and transformation of character, the communication of a gracious and holy principle, producing new desires, new capacities, *a new life*. The new birth is absolutely imperative, but this is the work of the Spirit of God from the very nature of the case. Birth altogether excludes the idea of any effort or work on the part of the one born, hence it is written "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing" (John 6:63).

The new birth is much, very much more than temporary remorse for sin, giving mental assent to the acceptance of Christ as personal Saviour, changing the course of life, or leaving off bad habits and substituting good ones. "It goes infinitely deeper than that - it is the inception and reception of a new life. It is radical, revolutionary, lasting, a *miracle*, the result of the supernatural operation of God." "Salvation is of the Lord" (Jonah 2:9), of Lord from beginning to end.

It is no marvel that the natural man needs to be born again, for he is totally depraved, a slave of sin and Satan, devoid of any love to God, any relish for heavenly things, and any ability to perform spiritual acts." The sinner has been totally "ruined by the fall," is "without strength" (Romans 5:6), hence it is written in John 6:44 "No man can come to Me, *except* the Father which has sent Me *draw* him." Only those who have been "*made* meet to be partakers of it a inheritance of the saints in light" (Col 1:12) and made holy shall enter heaven which is a "prepared place" for a prepared people (John 14:2). "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord" (Heb 12:14; Matt 5:8). "By his apostasy man lost his holiness, is wholly corrupt and under the dominion of dispositions and lusts which are directly contrary to God. The corruption of man's being is so great and entire that he will never truly repent unless and until he is supernaturally renewed by the Holy Spirit. In order for any to have Christ as their Saviour they must first have received Him is their 'Lord' (Col 2:6; Acts 2:36), as their King to rule over them, for God saves none in their rebellion against him." We must cease our rebellion against Him and His authority and give Him the throne of our hearts as our Ruler or He is not our Saviour no matter what our profession.

It seems to be the understanding of so many that if and when Christ is "offered" to man for his acceptance and he "surrenders" and he "gives his heart to Jesus" that the blood of Christ will then avail to wash away his sins. But not so. As well offer food to a corpse, for Ephesians 2:1-2 tells us that sinners are "dead in trespasses and sins," and certainly a "dead" man cannot "accept Christ" or cooperate with the of God. It is a sad delusion indeed that any should think that it lies it the power of the natural man to perform any act of what is naively termed "simple faith" and thus be saved. The truth of the Word of God is that before any man can be saved he must be "born of the Spirit" of God (John 3:8) and surrender to the authority of God else his profession is worthless and his religion vain.

To exhort sinners to be saved by "Accepting Christ as their Saviour" without pressing upon them the imperative necessity of repentance is dishonest, and is to falsify God's terms of salvation, for "*Except* ye repent ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 17:3) is the Divine dictum. The sinner must either repent or perish, there is no other alternative. And since "All have sinned" (Rom 3:23) all therefore need to

"repent and believe the Gospel" (Mark 1:15) else they will be "punished with ever lasting destruction" (2 Thes 1:9). To delay repentance then is most perilous.

"Repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18) is "not of a work of nature but a gracious work of the Spirit of God, begun in the heart and manifested in the new birth, continued throughout the entire life of the Christian, and consummated in Heaven."

"Accepting Christ as personal Savior" is a far, far cry, from that repentance that God demands from the sinner before he can be saved (see Acts 17:30). For salvation, "repentance unto life" is just as necessary as is faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. No sinner was ever pardoned while he remained impenitent, while he remained in rebellion against God and His authority, and without submitting himself wholeheartedly to His Lordship. This involves the realization in his heart, wrought therein by the Holy Spirit, of "the sinfulness of sin" (Rom 7:13), of the awfulness of ignoring the claims of God and of defying His Authority.

Repentance is a "holy horror and hatred of sin, a deep sorrow for it, a contrite acknowledgment of it before God, and a complete heart forsaking of it." Peter in Acts 3:19 did not say that all you have to do is to "Accept Christ" as your personal Saviour, but instead he said "*Repent* ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out."

From the above it is crystal clear that a mental assent to the Gospel will save no one, nor will a mere empty profession of faith in Christ. So many flatter themselves that they are born again because they have been baptized, joined some "church of their choice," received the Lord's supper, who do not have a keen and humbling sense of sin. Professing to be Christians, they are filled with a vain and presumptuous confidence that all is well with their souls, deluding themselves with hopes of mercy while continuing to live in a course of self-will and self-pleasing, But "the spiritual impotency of the natural man is total and entire, irreparable and irremediable so far as all human efforts are concerned. Fallen man is utterly indisposed and disabled, thoroughly opposed to God and His law, wholly inclined to evil."

The sinner in his natural state has no power in himself to accept Christ as his personal Saviour, or to "believe to the saving of his soul," nor has he any real desire or intention of doing so for the reason that, as stated above, his "carnal mind" is "enmity against God" (Rom 8:7). He is "the servant {lit. bondslave} of sin" (Rom 6:20) and must be made free from sin" (Rom 6:22) by the almighty "power of God" (Luke 9:43). That he is utterly helpless to save himself is clearly brought out in Jeremiah 13:23 where we read "*Can* the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" When he can do that then "may he also do good, that is accustomed to do evil." The sinner's "spiritual impotency consists in nothing but the depravity of his own heart, and his inveterate hatred of God. He is so helpless and hopeless in himself that he cannot take one step toward Christ for salvation." Hence he is cast upon God "from the womb" (Psalm 22:10) if ever he is to be saved, so to intimate to sinners that they can come to Christ whenever they agree to accept Christ as their personal Saviour is to deceive and bolster them up on a false "way of salvation." This is an exceedingly serious matter. They need to "seek the Lord while He is to be found, and call upon Him while He is near" (Isa 55:6).

How we do need to be reminded of the scriptural injunction to "Hold fast the form of sound words" (2 Tim 1:13), and present the Gospel as far as possible in "words which the Holy Ghost teacheth" and not in "words which man's wisdom teacheth" (1 Cor 2:13). Selah.

As another has so well said, "The saving work of Christ, that is, the saving of a soul from hell, is only *one* of His many offices and works that the Saviour does for men. If you heard the preacher say at the

wedding, 'George, do you take Margaret whom you hold by the hand as your lawful wedded cook?' you would sit up in astonishment and wonder at what kind of a marriage is taking place. No preacher calls attention to the work, or the ability, or the service which the bride will bring to her husband. In fact, the husband takes the wife for everything that she can do, and all that she is."

Yet in preaching the Gospel we call attention to *one work* of the Saviour instead of to the *Person Himself* who does that wonderful work. Let us see how the Scripture reads. Do we find in John 1:12, "But as many as received Him, *as their Saviour*, to them gave He power to become the sons of God"? No, the words "as their Saviour" are not found in the verse. Do we read in John 3:16, "that whosoever believeth in Him *as his own personal, Saviour*"? No, we do not. These words are not found in the verse. Nor are they found in 1 John 5:12, Matthew 11:28, etc. In fact, the expression *never* occurs, for the Holy Spirit does not attract the sinner's attention to one particular work, but always to the wonderful and precious Person who did, and who does the work.

"It is as at the wedding, the bride who married the rich man confesses that she is his bride, his wife. She does not say I took him as my banker, or as my companion, or as anything else. My experience has been through the years that those who profess to be saved through that kind of phraseology that is not found in the Bible quite often cannot be found after a few weeks or months" (Dr. W. L. Wilson in the Defender).

Pink says that "Man, with his invariable perversity, has reversed God's order. Modern evangelism urges giddy worldlings, with no sense of their lost condition, to 'Accept Christ as their personal Saviour,' and when such converts prove unsatisfactory to the churches special meetings are arranged where they are pressed to 'consecrate themselves' to Christ as Lord"!

How we do need to "Prove all things" and "hold fast it at which is good" (1 Thes 5:21)

Decisional Regeneration

by James E. Adams

Introduction:

What is Regeneration?

"Except a man be born again (1), he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Our Lord Jesus Christ taught that the new birth is so important that no one can see heaven without it. Mistakes concerning this doctrine have been very destructive to the Church of Christ. Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God. It is not a work of man. It is not something that man does but something that God does. The new birth is a change wrought in us, not an act performed by us. This is stated so beautifully by the Apostle John when in the first chapter of his Gospel he speaks of the children of God as those "which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (v. 13).

What is "Decisional Regeneration"?

The history of the Christian Church has seen many errors concerning the new birth. These teachings depart from Scripture by attributing to man the ability to regenerate himself. When these false concepts of man and the new birth are adopted, churches soon become corrupted with false practices. The Roman

Catholic church, the Anglican church, the Lutheran church and many other churches have all been corrupted at different times and to different degrees with the teaching of Baptismal Regeneration. Because of this erroneous teaching on regeneration, these churches have embraced false practices.

In the nineteenth century few controversies were so heated as the one over Baptismal Regeneration. It is interesting to note that C. H. Spurgeon (1836-1892), the most prolific preacher of that century, had printed in 1864 more copies of his sermon denouncing Baptismal Regeneration than of any other sermon. Baptismal Regeneration teaches that the new birth is conveyed by the waters of baptism. The sacrament is performed by man and is in his control.

But the twentieth century Church has, in "Decisional Regeneration," a more subtle falsehood to combat. "Decisional Regeneration" differs from Baptismal Regeneration only in the fact that it attaches the certainty of the new birth to a different act. This doctrine, just as Baptismal Regeneration, sees the new birth as the result of a mechanical process that can be performed by man. What is here called "Decisional Regeneration" has in its deceptive way permeated much of the Christian Church.

Our Purpose

The methods and theology of those that practice "Decisional Regeneration" need to be examined-not with a malicious spirit, but with a fervent desire that all of God's people may be one in doctrine and practice for the glory of God. We love all that are in Christ. But we agree wholeheartedly with Charles Spurgeon that "the best way to promote union is to promote truth.

It will not do for us to be all united together by yielding to one another's mistakes. We are to love each other in Christ; but we are not to be so united that we are not able to see each other's faults, and especially not able to see our own. No, purge the house of God, and then shall grand and blessed times dawn on us," (2). So then our purpose is not to question the sincerity of some Christians or to malign them, but to unite Christians in the truth as it is in our Lord. This alone is true Christian unity.

As we earnestly seek to bring unity to the Church of Christ let us turn from falsehood unto God's truth. The practice of-"Decisional Regeneration" in the Church must be exposed in order to save men from the damning delusion that because they have "decided" or "signed a card," they are going to heaven and are no longer under the wrath of God. The purity of the gospel is of extreme importance because it alone is the power of God unto salvation and the true basis of Christian unity.

Decisional Regeneration and Counseling

Some may still not understand exactly what is here meant by this term "Decisional Regeneration." Perhaps some are unfamiliar with the counseling courses that are being taught by many organizations in this country and abroad, and with the numerous "Soul Winning Conferences" that are taking place. In these meetings counselors are instructed that successful counseling must conclude with an individual's absolute assurance of salvation. Counselors are often instructed to assure an individual that his salvation is certain because he has prayed the prescribed prayer, and he has said "yes" to all the right questions.

We have an illustration of "Decisional Regeneration" when a popular present-day preacher prescribes a counseling procedure. He directs "Mr. Soul Winner" to ask an unconverted "Mr. Blank" a series of questions. If "Mr. Blank" says "yes" to all the questions, he is asked to pray a prescribed prayer and is then pronounced saved, (3). For the most part this counseling results in an individual being "regenerated" through a decision. This is essentially the same counseling method used in large evangelistic crusades across the world. These campaigns are like huge factories turning out as many as

ten thousand "decisions" in a week.

Mr. Iain Murray, in his timely book The Forgotten Spurgeon, points out that this same type of counseling is used in youth work:

"For example, a booklet, which is much circulated in student evangelism at the present time, lays down 'Three simple steps' to becoming a Christian: first, personal acknowledgment of sin, and second, personal belief in Christ's substitutionary work. These two are described as preliminary, but 'the third so final that to take it will make me a Christian. . .I must come to Christ and claim my personal share in what He did for everybody.' This all-decisive third step rests with me; Christ 'waits patiently until I open the door. Then He will come in....' Once I have done this I may immediately regard myself as a Christian. The advice follows: 'Tell somebody today what you have done,' "(4).

There are many variations of this type of counseling, but they all have in common a mechanical element such as the repeating of a prayer or signing of a card upon the performance of which the individual is assured of his salvation. Regeneration has thereby been reduced to a procedure which man performs. How differently did Jesus Christ deal with sinners. He did not have any instant salvation process. He did not speak to people with a stereotyped presentation. He dealt with every individual on a personal basis. Never in the New Testament do we find Christ dealing with any two persons in the same manner. It is enlightening to compare how differently He dealt with Nicodemus in John 3, and then with the woman at the well in John 4. Counseling needs to be personal.

There are a number of other problems with a mechanical counseling. Mr. Murray has pointed out the fact that on the basis of this counseling "a man may make a profession without ever having his confidence in his own ability shattered; he has been told absolutely nothing of his need of a change of nature which is not within his own power, and consequently, if he does not experience such a radical change, he is not dismayed. He was never told it was essential so he sees no reason to doubt whether he is a Christian.

Indeed, the teaching he has come under consistently militates against such doubts arising. It is frequently said that a man who has made a decision with little evidence of a change of life may be a 'carnal' Christian who needs instruction in holiness, or if the same individual should gradually lose his new-found interests, the fault is frequently attributed to lack of 'follow-up,' or prayer, or some other deficiency on the part of the Church. The possibility that these marks of worldliness and falling away are due to the absence of a saving experience at the outset is rarely considered; if this point were faced, then the whole system of appeals, decisions and counseling would collapse, because it would bring to the fore the fact that change of nature is not in man's power, and that it takes much longer than a few hours or days to establish whether a professed response to the gospel is genuine. But instead of facing this, it is protested that to doubt whether a man who has 'accepted Christ' is a Christian is tantamount to doubting the Word of God, and that to abandon 'appeals' and their adjuncts is to give up evangelism altogether." (5)

The counseling of "Decisional Regeneration" produces statistics that would encourage any Christian-until he follows up the so-called converts. In one heartbreaking experience forty "converts" of such counseling were contacted and only one person of these forty was found who appeared to be a Christian. One lady may have been reached, but what were the effects of the encounter on the other thirty-nine? Some of them may believe their eternal destinies were determined by their decisions, which is a fatal confidence if no change was wrought in their hearts and lives. The others may have concluded that they had experienced all that Christianity has to offer. Failing to feel or see any promised change in themselves, they have become convinced that Christianity is a fake and that those who hold it are either self-deluded fanatics or miserable hypocrites.

Robert Dabney, one of the great theologians of the nineteenth century, made some very penetrating observations concerning the disillusionment of people that have been counseled for a decision. Some of these individuals, he said:

"feel that a cruel trick has been played upon their inexperience by the ministers and friends of Christianity in thus thrusting them, in the hour of their confusion, into false positions, whose duties they do not and cannot perform, and into sacred professions which they have been compelled shamefully to repudiate. Their self respect is therefore galled to the quick, and pride is indignant at the humiliating exposure. No wonder that they look on religion and its advocates henceforward with suspicion and anger. Often their feelings do not stop here. They are conscious that they were thoroughly in earnest in their religious anxieties and resolves at the time, and that they felt strange and profound exercises. Yet bitter and mortifying experience has taught them that their new birth and experimental religion at least was a delusion. How natural to conclude that those of all others are delusions also? They say: 'the only difference between myself and these earnest Christians is, that they have not yet detected the cheat as I have. They are now not a whit more convinced of their sincerity and of the reality of their exercises than I once was of mine. Yet I know there was no change in my soul; I do not believe that there is in theirs.' Such is the fatal process of thought through which thousands have passed; until the country is sprinkled all over with infidels, who have been made such by their own experience of spurious religious excitements. They may keep their hostility to themselves in the main; because Christianity now 'walks in her silver slippers'; but they are not the less steeled against all saving impressions of the truth." (6)

Dabney penned these words a hundred years ago, long before the days of the "mass evangelism" and highly organized campaigns. If a hundred years ago the country was "sprinkled all over with infidels, who had been made such by their own experience of spurious religious excitements," what must be the situation today? This is a serious question for every Christian. To have led men, even sincerely, into false hope will be an awful condemnation for a Christian when he stands before Almighty God.

Decisional Regeneration and Altar Calls

One may read thousands of pages of the history of the Christian Church without finding a single reference to the "old-fashioned altar call" before the last century. Most Christians are surprised to learn that history before the time of Charles G. Finney (1792-1875) knows nothing of this type of "invitation." The practice of urging men and women to make a physical movement at the conclusion of a meeting was introduced by Mr. Finney in the second decade of the nineteenth century. Dr. Albert B. Dod, a professor of theology at Princeton Seminary at the time of Mr. Finney's ministry, pointed out the newness of the practice and showed that this method was without historical precedent. In his review of Finney's Lectures on Revival, Professor Dod stated that one will search the volumes of church history in vain for a single example of this practice before the 1820's, (7). Instead, history tells us that whenever the gospel was preached men were invited to Christ-not to decide at the end of a sermon whether or not to perform some physical action.

The Apostle Paul, the great evangelist, never heard of an altar call, yet today some consider the altar call to be a necessary mark of an evangelical church. In fact, churches which do not practice it are often accused of having no concern for the lost. Neither Paul nor Peter ever climaxed his preaching with forcing upon his hearers the decision to walk or not to walk. It is not only with church history, then, but with Scriptural history as well that the altar call is in conflict.

One may ask, "How did preachers of the gospel for the previous eighteen hundred years invite men to Christ without the use of the altar call?" They did so in much the same way as did the apostles and the other witnesses of the early Church. Their messages were filled with invitations for all men everywhere

to come to Christ.

Surely it will be admitted that the first sermon of the Christian Church was not climaxed by an altar call. Peter on the Day of Pentecost concluded his sermon with these words: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God has made that same Jesus, whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ." Peter stopped. Then the divinely inspired record tells us: "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said to Peter and to the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' " (Acts 2:36-37). This response was the result of the work of the

Spirit of God, not of clever appeals or psychological pressure. That day the apostles witnessed the conversion of three thousand people.

C. H. Spurgeon invited men to come to Christ, not to an altar. Listen to him invite men to Jesus Christ:

"Before you leave this place breathe an earnest prayer to God, saying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner. Lord, I need to be saved. Save me. I call upon Thy name....Lord, I am guilty, I deserve Thy wrath. Lord, I cannot save myself. Lord, I would have a new heart and a right spirit, but what can I do? Lord, I can do nothing, come and work in me to do of Thy good pleasure.

Thou alone hast power, I know

To save a wretch like me;

To whom, or whither should I go

If I should run from Thee?

But I now do from my very soul call upon Thy name. Trembling, yet believing, I cast myself wholly upon Thee, O Lord. I trust the blood and righteousness of Thy dear Son.... Lord, save me tonight, for Jesus' sake.' "

"Go home alone trusting in Jesus. 'I should like to go into the enquiry-room.' I dare say you would, but we are not willing to pander to popular superstition. We fear that in those rooms men are warmed into a fictitious confidence. Very few of the supposed converts of enquiry-rooms turn out well. Go to your God at once, even where you now are. Cast yourself on Christ, at once, ere you stir an inch!" (8)

Invitations such as Spurgeon gave directing men to Christ and not to aisles are needed today. George Whitefield's sermons were long invitations to men to come to Christ, not to an altar. The same may be said of the preaching of Jonathan Edwards, of the Reformers and of others in the past who were blessed with a harvest of many souls using Scriptural means of inviting men to Christ. Today the altar call has become the climax and culmination of the entire meeting. Many stanzas of a hymn are usually sung, during which time all kinds of appeals are made to the sinner to walk the aisle, and the clear impression is given to the sinner that his eternal destiny hangs on this movement of his feet.

"Just As I Am," the precious hymn perhaps most frequently sung for the altar call, was written in 1836 by Charlotte Elliott:

Just as I am, without one plea,

But that Thy blood was shed for me,

And that Thou bid'st me come to Thee,

O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

The phrase, "O Lamb of God, I come, I come," has been widely used to encourage people to "come" down the aisle. But it is significant that Miss Elliott wrote the hymn for the infirm and that it first appeared in a hymnal prepared especially for invalids, (9). To Miss Elliott, coming to Christ was not walking an aisle.

Although most who use the altar call realize that coming to Christ is not synonymous with coming to the altar, they do give the impression to sinners that the first step in coming to Christ is walking the aisle. I am purposefully being very careful not to misstate the case. I understand the sincerity of those who practice the altar call, it having been a part of every service from my earliest memory until college. In fact, I grew up in Christian circles unaware that evangelical Christianity existed without the altar call. In many services during this time my mind was centered on the glorious person of Christ and His suffering on the cross only to find the whole focus of the worship service suddenly changed at the conclusion from seeing the glories and sufferings of Christ to walking an aisle. Many others have spoken of the same experience -that the altar call and the clever appeals at the conclusion of meetings, the decision to walk or not to walk and the wondering how many will respond, have distracted them from seeking Christ and from worshipping God in spirit and truth.

Do you remember how the crowds physically followed our Lord Christ until He began to preach some unpopular truths? Then the crowds turned back (John 6:66). Why? Had they not come to Jesus with their feet? Yes, but this is not the coming to Him that is necessary for salvation. Christ said, "All that the Father gives me shall come to me; and him that comes to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). And again He said, "No man can come to me except the Father draw him" (John 6:44). In neither of these instances was Jesus speaking of the physical movement of the feet.

Men today need to be reminded that coming to Christ is not walking an aisle, but is casting oneself on Christ for life or death. May God cause the Church to return to the Scriptures for its methods of winning men to Christ. May sinners be charged not to come forward in a meeting but to come to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Decisional Regeneration and Preaching

The false teaching of "Decisional Regeneration" has polluted even the structure of the sermon. Jack Hyles, considered by many to be an authority on preaching, gives the following advice to his fellow-ministers:

"Many of us in our preaching will make such statements as, 'Now, in conclusion'; 'Finally, may I say'; 'My last point is . . .'. These statements are sometimes dangerous. The sinner knows five minutes before you finish; hence he digs in and prepares himself for the invitation so that he does not respond. However, if your closing is abrupt and a lost person does not suspect that you are about finished, you have crept up on him and he will not have time to prepare himself for the invitation. Many people may be reached, using this method," (10).

At the first reading of such a teaching one might believe, or at least hope, that he misread Mr. Hyles. The second, third and fourth readings, however, confirm that Mr. Hyles actually teaches that men may be converted to Christ as a result of some clever method a minister uses in his sermon, and that one's eternal destiny may be determined by the impulse of an unguarded moment. This idea that a man's

salvation may depend upon his being "crept up on" and giving his unwilling consent is in direct conflict with what the Scriptures teach concerning the receiving of Jesus Christ. In reality the kind of Preaching that tries to creep up on sinners results for the most part in bringing people to religion, not to Christ. Can there be any more terrible result of a sermon than the bringing of people to something other than our Lord Jesus Christ?

True preaching is not a clever device of man, but a demonstration of the Spirit of God as the truth of God is proclaimed. I can never forget hearing Dr. David Martyn Lloyd-Jones illustrate what true preaching is with an account of George Whitefield preaching in the church of Jonathan Edwards:

"There was this genius Jonathan Edwards listening to Whitefield, who wasn't in the same field, of course, from the standpoint of genius and ability and so on. But as he was listening to Whitefield, his face, says Whitefield, was shining. Edwards' face was shining and tears were streaming down his face. Edwards was recognizing this authentic, authoritative note-this preaching. Whitefield was in the Spirit. Edwards was in the Spirit, and the two were blended together. The whole congregation and the preacher were one in the hand of God. That is preaching. May God enable us to practice it and experience it,"(11).

The preaching of which Dr. Lloyd-Jones is speaking of and which the New Testament speaks is far removed from the trickery used in much modern preaching. Biblical preaching declares that men are not born again by the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:13).

"Decisional Regeneration" does not bring men to Christ any more than does Baptismal Regeneration. It is true that some are converted under such preaching, but this is in spite of the false methods used, not because of them. The Bible is clear in its declaration that only by the Spirit of God can men be born again. True repentance and saving faith come as the result of the new birth and are never the cause of the great change. Repentance and faith are the acts of regenerated men, not of men dead in sins (Eph. 2:1, 5). However, God does not act for us; He does not believe for us; and He surely cannot repent for us-He has no sin for which to repent. We must personally, knowingly and willingly trust in Christ for salvation. Nor are we saying that preachers should not urge, yea, plead with men to repent and believe. Any preaching which merely rehearses the facts of the gospel without calling men to repentance and faith in Christ as a merciful and mighty Saviour of sinners is not biblical preaching.

The apostles taught that God saves His elect through the foolishness of preaching. All new methods devised by man can only fall far short of this ordained means of converting the sinner. The Church must forsake its carnal inventions and once again be guided by the teaching of Scripture if it is to expect God to bless its efforts and multiply its harvest. The Scriptural means of evangelizing is to "preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (I Cor. 1:23-24).

Decisional Regeneration and Theology

Whether it is openly recognized or not, there are always certain doctrinal presuppositions which underlie the methods used in evangelism. What kind of teaching, then, has allowed the Church to depart from historic Christianity and to take up these new devices?

The new birth according to our Lord Jesus Christ is a sovereign work of the Spirit of God in the heart of man (John 3:8). Yet in conflict with Christ's teaching, one of the forefathers of this new evangelism states that "Religion is the work of man." This is a shocking statement, especially since it is found on the very first page of Lectures on Revivals of Religion, the most influential of all of Charles G. Finney's

writings, (12). The great theological difference between modern evangelism and biblical evangelism hinges on this basic question whether true religion is the work of God or of man. At best, the doctrine of "Decisional Regeneration" attributes the new birth partly to man and partly to God.

J. H. Merle d'Aubigne (1794-1872) in his history of the Reformation in England states that:

"to believe in the power of man in the work of regeneration is the great heresy of Rome, and from that error has come the ruin of the Church. Conversion proceeds from the grace of God alone, and the system which ascribes it partly to man and partly to God is worse than Pelagianism," (13).

One of the greatest American theologians, Charles Hodge (1797-1878), also points out the danger of this teaching:

"No more soul-destroying doctrine could well be devised than the doctrine that sinners can regenerate themselves, and repent and believe just when they please. . . As it is a truth both of Scripture and of experience that the unrenewed man can do nothing of himself to secure his salvation, it is essential that he should be brought to a practical conviction of that truth. When thus convicted, and not before, he seeks help from the only source whence it can be obtained." (14)

In both the above statements stress is put upon man's helplessness to be born anew, and the necessity for God to create life. It is especially in these two areas that the doctrine of "Decisional Regeneration" deviates from the biblical doctrine of regeneration. This brings us to the foundational issue of "Decisional Regeneration": What is the spiritual condition of man?

Can a man be born again by answering "yes" to a certain group of questions? Can a man be born from "above" by walking to the front of a building? Can a man become a true Christian by responding to an invitation as a result of being "crept up on" unawares? Your answers to these questions will be determined by your view of man's spiritual condition. What is man's spiritual state?

The grand old Scottish theologian Thomas Boston (1676-1732) very vividly illustrated man's spiritual condition by comparing the unconverted person to a man in a pit. He can only get out of the pit in one of two ways: he may through much toil and difficulty scale the sides of the pit to the top, which is the way of works; or, he may grab hold of the rope of grace let down by Christ and be pulled out of his misery. Yes, he may decide to pull himself up by the rope of the gospel,
"but, alas! the unconverted man is dead in the pit, and cannot help himself either of these ways."(15)

Man is spiritually dead in trespasses and sins and cannot please God (Eph. 2:1; Rom. 8:8). Our Saviour Himself portrayed man's condition as one of utter helplessness: "No man can come to me except the Father who has sent me draw him"; "No man can come to me except it were given to him of my Father" (John 6:44, 65).

This state of death and bondage to sin cannot be changed by making a decision or by walking an aisle. A man cannot make himself a Christian. Only the Spirit of God can create a new man in Christ. God in His grace gives men new hearts. Only then can they willingly repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. God Himself has stated this truth by saying: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes..." (Ezek. 36:26, 27). Jesus Christ also clearly said, "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom he wishes" (John 5:21).

The greatness of God's power in saving sinners can only be seen against the background of man's desperate condition. What a glorious doctrine is the new birth to the helpless sinner! May the Church return to biblical doctrine so that it may evangelize again to the glory of God.

How helpless guilty nature lies,
Unconscious of its load!
The heart, unchanged can never rise
To happiness and God.
The will perverse, the passions blind,
In paths of ruin stray;
Reason, debased, can never find
The safe, the narrow way.
Can aught, beneath a power divine,
The stubborn will subdue?
Tis Thine, almighty Saviour, Thine,
To form the heart anew.
O change these wretched hearts of ours,
And give them life divine!
Then shall our passions and our powers,
Almighty Lord, be Thine!
-Isaac Watts

What Must we Do?

It is not a time to be silent; it is time to speak out. We have kept quiet too long, somehow feeling that if we opposed these unbiblical practices we might be hindering the good work of evangelism, believing that among the multitudes of "decisions" there are some genuine conversions. But with every passing week thousands are being counseled into a false hope! Men are directed to walk aisles when they should be pointed to Christ alone. The high calling of preaching has degenerated into a series of gimmicks and tricks. These false practices have resulted from the perversion of biblical doctrine. In the midst of this darkness let us pray that God may be pleased to revive His Church again. This revival can come only through Christ. Men must turn afresh to His directions for counseling, to His free invitations to sinners and to the preaching of His gospel. Only then will our labors bring glory to God; and if God grants, many sinners will be converted for His glory.

Endnotes:

1) The word "again" is better rendered "from above." It points to the ultimate source of the new birth, the Triune God.

2) C. H. Spurgeon, The New Park Street Pulpit (London, 1964), Vol. 6, p. 171.

3) Jack Hyles, How To Boost Your Church Attendance (Grand Rapids, 1958), pp. 32-35.

4) Iain H. Murray, The Forgotten Spurgeon (London, 1966), p. 110. * (5) Ibid, p. 111.

6) Robert L. Dabney, Discussions: Evangelical and Theological (London, 1967), Vol. 2, p. 13.

7) Albert B. Dod, "The Origin of the Call for Decisions," The Banner of Truth Magazine (London, Dec., 1963), Vol. 32, p. 9.

8) Murray, op. cit., pp. 107-109.

9) John Julian, A Dictionary of Hymnology (London, 1907) p. 609.

10) Hyles, op. cit., pp. 43-44.

11) Recorded in shorthand from a sermon, "The Responsibility of Evangelism," preached at Grace Baptist Church, Carlisle, Pa., in June, 1969.

12) For the clearest statement of Finney's theory of regeneration read his sermon, "Sinners Bound To Change their Own Hearts," Sermons on Various Subjects (New York, 1835). For a detailed examination of Finney's theology see "Review of Lectures on Systematic Theology," The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review (Philadelphia, 1847), Vol. 19, pp. 237-Z77; also Benjamin B. Warfield, "The Theology of Charles C. Finney," Perfectionism (Philadelphia, 1967), pp. 166-215.

13) J. H. Merle d'Aubigne, The Reformation in England (London, 1962), Vol. 1, p. 98.

14) Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids, 1970), Vol. 2, p. 277.

15) Thomas Boston, Human Nature in Its Fourfold State (London, 1964), p. 183.

Gospel Preaching Commanded

By Arthur W. Pink

There are those who misrepresent the doctrine of election in this way. Here I am sitting down at my table tonight with my family to tea. It is a cold winter's night, and outside on the street are some hungry starving tramps and children, and they come and knock on my door and they say, "We are so hungry, Sir, Oh, we are so hungry and cold, and we are starving: won't you give us something to eat?" Give you something to eat? No, you do not belong here, get off with you." Now people say that is what election means, that God has spread the gospel feast and some poor sinners conscious of their deep need come to the Lord and say, "Have mercy upon me, and the Lord says, "No, you are not among My elect." Now, my friends, that is not the teaching of this Book, nor anything like that. That is absolutely a false representation of God's truth. I do not believe anything like that, my friends, and I would not insult you by asking you to come here night by night and listen to anything like that.

1. Compel them to come in

Now then, here is the truth. God has spread the feast but the fact is that nobody is hungry. and nobody wants to come to the feast, and everybody makes an excuse to keep away from the feast. and when they are bidden to come they say, "No, we do not want to, or We are not ready yet." Now God knew that from the beginning, and if God had done nothing more than spread the feast every seat at His table would have been vacant for all eternity! I have no hesitation in saying there is not one man or woman in this church tonight, but who made excuses time after time before you first came to Christ. You are just like the rest. You made excuses. so did I, and if God had done nothing more than just spread the feast every chair would have been vacant, therefore what do you read in that parable in Luke 14? Because the feast was not furnished with guests God sent forth His "servants". Oh, put your glasses on. It does not say "servants", it says God sent forth His "servant" and told Him to "compel" them to come in that His feast might be furnished with guests. And there is not a man or a woman in this church tonight or in any other church that would ever sit down at the marriage-supper of the Lamb unless you had been compelled to come in, and compelled by God.

Well, you say, what do you mean by "compelled?" I mean this, that God had to overcome the resistance of your will, God had to overcome the reluctance of your heart, God had to overcome your loving of pleasure more than loving of God, your love of the things of this world more than Christ. I mean that God had to put forth His power and draw you, and if any of you know anything of the Greek or have a Strong's Concordance, look up that Greek verb for "draw" in John 6:44, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" —It means "use violence". It means to drag by force. There is not a Greek scholar on earth that can challenge that statement — I mean — and back it up with proof. It's the same Greek word that is used in John 21 when they drew the net to the land full of fishes. They had to pull with all their might for it was full of fishes. They had to drag it, Yes, my friend, and that is how you were brought to Christ. You may not have been conscious of it. you may not have known inside yourself what was taking place, but every last one of us was a rebel against God, fighting against Christ, resisting His Holy Spirit, and God had to put forth almighty power and overcome that resistance and bring us to our knees, and if any of you object to that strong language, then I am here to tell you, you do not believe in the teaching of this Book on the absolute depravity of man. Man is lost, and man is dead in trespasses and sins by nature. Listen, it is not simply that man is sick and needs a little medicine: it is not simply that man is ignorant and needs a little teaching: it is not simply that man is weak and needs a little hope: man is dead, dead in trespasses and sins, and only almighty power from heaven can ever resurrect him and bring him from death unto life. That is the gospel I believe in and I do not preach the gospel because I believe the sinner has power in himself to respond to it.

Well, you say, then what is the use of preaching the gospel if men are dead? What is the use of preaching it? I will tell you. Listen! Here was a man with a withered hand, paralyzed, and Christ says. "Stretch forth thine hand"; It was the one thing that he could not do! Christ told him to do a thing that was impossible in himself. Well then you say why did Christ tell him to stretch forth his hand? Because Divine power went with the very word that commanded him to do it! Divine power enabled him to. The man could not do it of himself. If you think that he could you are ready for the lunatic asylum, I don't not care who you are. Any man or woman here who thinks that that man was able to stretch forth his paralyzed arm by an effort of his own will is ready for the lunatic asylum! How can paralysis move? Well, I will give you something stronger than that. You need something strong today, you need something more than skim-milk, you need strong meat if ever you are going to be built up and grow and become strong in the Lord and the power of His might—Here is a man who is dead and buried and his body has already begun to corrupt so that it stank. There he was in the grave and someone came to that graveside and said, "Lazarus. come forth", and if that someone had been anyone else than God Himself manifest in flesh. he might have stood there till now calling, "Come forth". What on earth was the use of telling a dead man to come forth? None at all, unless the One Who spoke that word had the power to make that word good.

Now then my friends, I preach the gospel to sinners, not because I believe the sinner has any power at all in himself to respond to it: I do not believe that any sinner has any capacity in himself whatever. But Christ said, "the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life", and by God's grace I go forth preaching this Word because it is a word of power, a word of spirit, a word of life. The power is not in the sinner, it is in the Word when God the Holy Spirit is pleased to use it. And my friends, I say in all reverence; if God told me in this Book to go out and preach to the trees. I would go! Yes sir. God once told one of His servants to go and preach to bones and he went. I wonder if you should have gone! Yes, that has a local application as well as a future interpretation prophetically:

2. Preach the Gospel to Every Creature

Now the question arises again, why are we to preach the gospel to every creature?—if God has only elected a certain number to be saved? The reason is, because God commands us to do so. Well, but, you say, it does not seem reasonable to me That has got nothing to do with it; your business is to obey God

and not to argue with Him. God commands us to preach the gospel to every creature and it means what it says—every creature and it is solemn thing. Every Christian in this room tonight has yet to answer to Christ why he has not done everything in his power to send that gospel to every creature! Yes, I believe in missions—probably stronger than most of you do, and if I preached to you on missions perhaps I would hit you harder than you have been hit yet. The great majority of Gods people who profess to believe in missions, are just playing at them—I make so bold as to say of our evangelical denominations today that we are just playing at missions and that is all.

Why my friends, there is almost half of the human race—think of it—in this 20th century—travel so easy and cheap. Bibles printed in almost every language under heaven, and as we sit here tonight there is almost half of the human race that never yet heard of Christ, and we have got to answer to Christ for that yet! You have and I have, Oh. yes, I believe in man's responsibility. I do not believe in man's "freedom" but I do in man's responsibility, and I believe in the Christian's responsibility in a double way, and everyone of us here tonight has yet got to face Christ and look into those eyes as a flame of fire, and He is going to say to us, I entrusted to you My gospel. It was committed as a "trust" to you, (See 1 Thess. 2:4) It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.

Oh, my friends, we are playing at things. We have not begun to take religion seriously, any of us. We profess to believe in the coming of Christ, and we profess to believe that the one reason why Christ has not come back yet is because His Church, His Body, is not yet complete. We believe that when His body is complete He will come back. And my friends, His "body"never, never, will be complete until the last of His elect people will be called out, and His elect people are called out under the preaching of the gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit, and if you are really anxious for Christ to come back soon, then you had better be more wide awake to your responsibility in connection with taking or sending the gospel to the heathen! Christ's word, and it is Christ's word to us, is "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel", He does not say "Sendye", He says "Go ye", and you have to answer to Christ yet because you have not gone!

Well, you say, do you mean by that that everyone of us here tonight ought to go out to the mission field? I have not said that, I am not any man's judge, Many of you here tonight have a good reason which will satisfy Christ why you have not gone. He gave you work to do here. He put you in a position here. He has given you responsibilities to discharge here, but every Christian who is free to go, and does not go, has got to answer to Christ for it yet. "Go ye into all the world." Well then you say, Where am I to go? Oh, that is very easy. You say, easy? Yes, I mean it: it is very easy. There is nothing easier in the world than to know where you ought to begin missionary work. You have it in the first chapter of Acts and the eighth verse: "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem (that is the city in which they were) and in all Judea (that is the State in which their city was), and in Samaria (that is the adjoining State), and unto the uttermost part of the earth", If you want to begin missionary work, you have to begin it in your home-town, and my friends if you are not interested in the salvation of the Chinese in Sydney, then you are not really interested in the salvation of the Chinese in China, and you are only fooling yourselves if you think you are! Oh, I am calling a spade a spade tonight. If you are anxious about the souls of the Chinese in China, then you will be equally anxious about the souls of the Chinese here in Sydney, and I wonder how many in this building tonight have ever made any serious effort to reach the Chinese in Sydney with the gospel! I wonder? I wonder how many here tonight have been round to the Bible House in Sydney and have said to the Manager there, "Do you have any New Testaments in the Chinese language, or do you have any Gospels of John in the Chinese language? How much are they per hundred? or per dozen?" And I wonder how many of you have bought a thousand or a hundred, and then have gone round to the houses in the Chinese quarter and have said, "My friend, this is a little gift that will do your soul good if you will read it." Ah, my friends, we are playing at missions, it is just a farce, that is all! "Go ye" is the first command. Go where? Those around me first. Go what with? The gospel! Well, you say, "Why

should I go?" Because God has commanded you to! Well, you say, "What is the use of doing it if He has just elected certain ones?" Because that gospel is the means that God uses to call out His own elect, that is why! You do not know, and I do not know, and nobody here on earth knows, who are God's elect and who are not. They are scattered over the world, and therefore we are to preach the gospel to every creature, that it may reach the ones that God has marked out among those creatures.

From a sermon preached in Sydney during his Australian ministry in the 1920's.

TULIP or WEEDS?

by Daniel Parks

Is salvation the work of God alone? or of man cooperating with God? Is salvation bestowed by God's grace alone? or does man merit it through an act of self-righteousness performed by his own free will?

Church history is highlighted by confrontations on this doctrine. Those who preach salvation involves man's free will and works have ever opposed those who preach salvation by God's grace alone. Scribes and Pharisees opposed Jesus Christ and the apostles. In the fifth century, disciples of Pelagius opposed disciples of Augustine. During the Middle Ages, Roman Catholics opposed Anabaptists and, from 1517, Protestants. And from 1611, Arminians (free-willers) have opposed Calvinists.

These two beliefs are identified by the acronyms WEEDS and TULIP.
Are you a TULIP basking in God's sovereign grace?
Or are you among the WEEDS, boasting of self-righteousness?

As you examine the table below, you will see that the references to Bible verses in the right column are verses that the Arminians (free-willers) either ignore, misunderstand or don't even acknowledge. It is easy to see how people can fall into the trap of believing the free-will gospel when they completely ignore verses that state the opposite of what they believe about man, God and salvation. As with any Bible doctrine, it is easy to make a case for your particular interpretation if you and your hearers examine only one or two verses in isolation. And of course it is natural for people to NOT believe the true Gospel of salvation by grace alone if they do not possess that salvation but are still dead in their trespasses and sins. It is also natural for the unsaved to think that they are free to choose Christ at any time, when in reality, the God of the Bible says they are totally in bondage to sin, lost and ***unable*** to come to Christ of the "own free will". Without a supernatural act of God - without a new heart and spirit - that will remains in rebellion to the true Savior and true Gospel.

WEEDS	**TULIP**
THE FALSE FREE-WILL GOSPEL OF SALVATION INVOLVING MAN'S FREE	**THE TRUE GOSPEL OF SALVATION BY GOD'S GRACE**

WILL	ALONE
Will of Man Is Free - Mankind is influenced by sin, but not under its dominion, as all yet have free will and the ability to determine their own destiny. Anyone can of his own free will come to Christ for salvation. All men have faith, but not all will exercise it.	**Total Depravity -** Mankind is spiritually dead and under the dominion of sin (Ephesians 2:1-3; John 8:34). None will of his own will come to Christ for salvation (John 5:40; 6:65). None has faith unless God graciously bestows it (Ephesians 2:8).
Election Is Conditional - Election to salvation involves both the sinner choosing God and God choosing the sinner. God's choice was conditioned upon man's choice, as God chose in eternity past those whom he foresaw in time believing in Jesus Christ for salvation.	**Unconditional Election -** God the Father has graciously chosen and predestined to salvation some of our fallen race (2 Thessalonians 2:13; Ephesians 1:3-6). His choice was in no way conditioned upon foreseen good or merit in the chosen ones (John 15:16).
Every Man Is Redeemed - Jesus Christ died for every one, paying the price of redemption for them all. But this does not guarantee their forgiveness, as many of His redeemed will be eventually damned because of unbelief.	**Limited Atonement -** Jesus Christ died as the substitute of God's elect, forever redeeming and forgiving them (Isaiah 53:4-6,8b; Ephesians 1:7). He did not die for any who will die in unbelief (John 10:11,26).
Denial Confounds Grace - The sovereignty of God does not extend to His salvation, as man's will can here thwart God's purpose. God is trying to save every sinner, but He is helpless to save any sinner who will not let Him.	**Irresistible Grace -** God will not be thwarted in His purpose of salvation (Daniel 4:35). Every one of His chosen and redeemed sinners will be brought to saving faith in Jesus Christ (John 5:37,45; Romans 8:29).
Some Will Lose Salvation - God cannot preserve in salvation those who of their own free will refuse to be preserved. Those believers who do not remain faithful to the very end will lose their salvation, "fall from grace," and eventually perish.	**Perseverance Of The Saints -** God preserves in salvation all believers in Christ, and none will ever perish (Jude 24, John 3:16; 10:28). And He enables them to persevere to the end, so that none will be lost (Jeremiah 32:40; Romans 8:35-39).

"Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn." [Matthew 13:24-30]

DO YOU POSSESS TRUE SALVATION OR ARE YOU STILL CLINGING TO A MAN-CENTERED GOSPEL?

(edited by Ray Kane)

The Myth Of Free Will
by Walter Chantry

MOST PEOPLE say that they believe in "free will." Do you have any idea what that means? I believe that you will find a great deal of superstition on this subject. The will is saluted as the grand power of the human soul which is completely free to direct our lives. But from what is it free? And what is its power?

THE MYTH OF CIRCUMSTANTIAL FREEDOM

No one denies that man has a will — that is, a faculty of choosing what he wishes to say, do, and think. But have you ever reflected on the pitiful weakness of your will? Though you have the ability to make a decision, *you do not have the power to carry out your purpose.* Will may devise a course of action, but will has no power to execute its intention.

Joseph's brothers hated him. They sold him to be a slave. But God used their actions to make him a ruler over themselves. They chose their course of action to harm Joseph. But God in His power directed events for Joseph's good. He said, "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good" (Gen 50:20).

And how many of your decisions are miserably thwarted? You may choose to be a millionaire, but God's providence is likely to prevent it. You may decide to be a scholar, but bad health, an unstable home, or lack of finances may frustrate your will. You choose to go on a vacation, but an automobile accident may send you to the hospital instead.

By saying that your will is free, we certainly do not mean that it determines the course of your life. You did not choose the sickness, sorrow, war, and poverty that have spoiled your happiness. You did not choose to have enemies. If man's will is so potent, why not choose to live on and on? But you must die. The major factors which shape your life cannot thank your will. You did not select your social status, color, intelligence, etc.

Any sober reflection on your experience will produce the conclusion, "A man's heart deviseth his way: but THE LORD DIRECTETH his steps" (Prov 16:9). Rather than extolling the human will, we ought to humbly praise the Lord whose purposes shape our lives. As Jeremiah confessed, "O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer 10:23).

Yes, you may choose what you want, and you may plan what you will do; but your will is not free to accomplish *anything contrary to the purposes of God.* Neither have you any power to reach your goals but that which God allows you. The next time you are so enamored with your own will, remember Jesus' parable about the rich man. The wealthy man said, "This I WILL do: I WILL pull down all my barns, and build greater: and there I WILL bestow all my fruits and my goods. . . But God said unto him. Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee" (Luke 12:18-21). He was free to plan but not free to accomplish; so it is with you.

THE MYTH OF ETHICAL FREEDOM

But freedom of the will is cited as an important factor in making MORAL decisions. Man's will is said to be free to choose between good and evil. But again we must ask, from what is it free? And what is man's will free to choose?

The will of man is his *power to choose between alternatives.* Your will does decide your actions from a number of options. You have the faculty to direct your own thoughts, words, and deeds. Your decisions are not formed by an outside force, but from within yourself. No man is compelled to act contrary to his will, nor forced to say what he does not wish. Your will guides your actions.

Yet this does not mean that the power to decide is free from all influence. You make choices based on your understanding, your feelings, your likes and dislikes, and your appetites. In other words, your will is not free from *yourself*! Your choices are determined by your own basic character. The will is not independent of your nature, but the *slave* of it. Your choices do not shape your character, but your character guides your choices. The will is quite partial to what you know, feel, love, and desire. *You always choose on the basis of your disposition. according to the condition of your heart.*

It is just for this reason that your will is NOT free to do good. Your will is the servant of your heart, and your heart is evil. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that EVERY imagination of the thoughts of his heart was ONLY evil CONTINUALLY" (Gen 6:5). "There is NONE that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom 3:12). No power forces man to sin contrary to his will, but the descendants of Adam are so evil that they always choose the evil.

Your decisions are molded by your understanding, and the Bible says of all men, 'And their foolish heart was darkened" (Rom 1:21). Man can only be righteous when he desires to have fellowship with God but, "There is NONE that seeketh after God" (Rom 3:11). Your appetites crave sin, and thus you cannot choose God. *To choose good is contrary to human nature.* If you chose to obey God, it would be the result of external compulsion. But you are free to choose and hence your choice is enslaved to your own evil nature.

If fresh meat and tossed salad were placed before a hungry lion, he would choose the flesh. This is because his nature dictates the selection. It is just so with man. The will of man is free from outside force, but not from the bias of human nature. That bias is against God. Man's power of decision are free to choose whatever the human heart dictates; *therefore there is no possibility of a man choosing to please God without prior work of divine grace.*

What most people mean by free will is the idea that man is by nature neutral and therefore able to choose either good or evil. This simply is not true. The human will and the whole of human nature is bent to ONLY evil CONTINUALLY Jeremiah asked, *"Can* the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots'? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil" (Jer 13:23). It is impossible. It is contrary to nature. Thus do men desperately need the supernatural transformation of their natures, else their wills are enslaved to choosing evil.

In spite of the great praise that is given to "free will," we have seen that man's will is not free to choose a course contrary to God's purposes nor free to act contrary to his own moral nature. Your will does not determine the events of your life nor the circumstances of it. Ethical choices are not formed by a neutral mind but always dictated by your personality makeup.

THE MYTH OF SPIRITUAL FREEDOM

Nevertheless many assert that the human will makes the ultimate choice of spiritual life or spiritual

death. They say that here the will is altogether free to choose eternal life offered in Jesus Christ or to reject it. It is said that God will give a new heart to all who choose by the power of their own free will to receive Jesus Christ.

There can be no question that receiving Jesus Christ is an act of the human will. It is often called "faith." But how do men come to willingly receive the Lord? It is usually answered, "Out of the power of their own free will." But how can that be? Jesus is a PROPHET. To receive Him means to believe all that He says. In John 8:41-45 Jesus made it clear that you were born of Satan. This evil father hates the truth and imparted the same bias into your heart by nature. Hence said Jesus, "*Because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not.*" How does the human will jump out of man to choose to believe what the human mind hates and denies?

Further, to receive Jesus means to embrace him as a PRIEST — that is, to employ and depend on him to seek out peace with God by sacrifice and intercession. Paul tells us that the mind with which we were born is hostile to God (Rom 8:7). How can the will escape the influence of human nature which was born with a violent enmity to God? It would be insane for the will to choose peace when every bone and drop of blood cries out for rebellion.

Then too, receiving Jesus means to welcome Him as a KING. It means choosing to obey His every command, to confess His right of rule and to worship before His throne. But the human mind, emotions, and desires all cry out, "*We will not have this man to reign over us*" (Luke 19:14). If my whole being hates His truth, hates His rule and hates peace with God, how can my will be responsible for receiving Jesus? How can such a sinner have faith?

It is not man's will but God's GRACE that must be thanked for giving a sinner a new heart. Unless God changes the heart, creates a new spirit of peace, truthfulness, and submission, man will not choose to receive Jesus Christ and eternal life in Him. A new heart must be given before a man can believe, or else the human will is hopelessly enslaved to evil human nature even in the matter of conversion. Jesus said. "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye MUST be born again" (John 3:7). Unless you are, you will never see His kingdom.

Read John 1:12 & 13. It says that those who believe on Jesus have been "born, not of the will of man, but of God." *As your will is not responsible for your coming into this world, it is not responsible for the new birth.* It is your Creator who must be thanked for your life, and if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation (II Cor 5:17). Who ever chose to be created? When Lazarus rose from the dead, he then could choose to answer the call of Christ, but he could not choose to come to life. So Paul said in Ephesians 2:5, "Even when we were dead in sins, [God] hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)." Faith is the first act of a will made new by the Holy Spirit. Receiving Christ is an act of man just as breathing is, but God must first give life.

No wonder Martin Luther wrote a book entitled *The Bondage of the Will* which he considered one of his most important treatises. The will is in the chains of an evil human nature. You who extol the free will as a great force are clinging to a root of pride. Man, as fallen in sin, is utterly helpless and hopeless. The will of man offers no hope. It was the will choosing the forbidden fruit that brought us into misery. The powerful grace of God alone offers deliverance. Cast yourself upon God's mercy for salvation. Ask for the Spirit of Grace that He may create a new spirit within you.

What DO We Believe?

by Greg Elmquist

In times past some of us have recited what has been known as the "Apostles Creed" as a declaration of our faith. I have no interest in reviving this practice or writing an addendum to this document. But, I do want you to see that the very heart of the gospel is no where to be found in the content of this popular creed. The reason that everyone from Roman Catholics to reformed Presbyterians can agree with the statements contained in it is because the offense of the gospel is completely absent. Someone might ask; "Isn't this what Christians believe?" My answer is yes... but oh, we believe so much more. As is usually the case, the problem is not with what is said, the problem is with what is not said. Read it, you'll see what I mean.

"I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. The third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven, sitteth at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost, the universal church, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting."

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ fully and finally accomplished redemption for all of God's elect when He died on the cross of Calvary. We believe that when He died as our Substitute under the wrath of God that He fully and finally satisfied Divine justice by paying the sin debt and thereby secured salvation for all for whom He died. We believe that Christ through the Holy Spirit will also succeed in effectually calling and bringing all that He died for with Him into everlasting Glory. We believe that any gospel that robs our Lord of this, HIS glory in the finished, successful, accomplished work of salvation, is another gospel.... which is no gospel at all. Now, there's the real offense and power of the gospel. **Do you believe that?**

The Litmus Test

Does YOUR Church Pass It? - Does YOUR Gospel Pass It?

by Ray Kane

Many Christians use all kinds of tests (criteria) to determine if a church or ministry is OK (safe to be a part of) or if instead, they are wolves in sheep's clothing (and should be avoided). Some Christians check to see if the ministry adheres to the Apostle's Creed. Some folks just see if the church or ministry claims to "believe in Jesus", whatever that may mean. Other's check to see if the church is evangelistic or active in the community in some way. Other's look for a statement of faith that says the ministry believes in the trinity, the virgin birth, etc.

As a blood-bought child of God who has been in and around all sorts of churches and ministries and who has searched the scriptures for years and has been confronted by those who had more wisdom from God than myself, I have finally learned the TRUE LITMUS TEST to see if a ministry, a church, a missionary, preacher, teacher, pastor, or evangelist is OK.

And that test is simply this:

Do they know the TRUE Gospel of salvation by grace alone through the completed work of Christ alone?

Do they have the gospel of Paul, of Calvin, of John Gill, of Matthew Henry, of Charles Spurgeon? Or do they instead have the **POPULAR gospel of today** which is the man-centered, "get-yourself-saved-anytime-you-want" FREE-WILL gospel which can save no one but sure sounds so appealing since you can get yourself saved at the last minute on your deathbed after living your whole life as an ungodly sinner.*[see note below]

Are YOU in a church that never studies Romans chapter 9 or never studies it in entirety or makes excuses for difficult verses like "Jacob I loved but Esau I hated" rather than letting God be God and letting the King of all Creation have mercy on whom He will have mercy? Friend, if you have never even heard of Calvinism (also known as "The Doctrines Of Grace"), then it is very likely that you are in a church that preaches a false "free-will" gospel. If your church or ministry uses mass psychology or psychological devices like altar calls to coax sinners into making "a decision", then your church is preaching a false plan of salvation that puts the sinner in the driver seat and puts God at the mercy of the sinner. If your church tells every one to bow their heads and close their eyes so sinners are not embarrassed to "come forward and accept Christ", then YOU are in a church that does not HAVE God's true, one and only plan of salvation. When Christ walked the earth and commanded men to repent He never told people to bow their heads and close their eyes while certain shy sinners decided whether or not they should walk down an aisle. What an absurd gospel as compared to the real Gospel: **"I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."! [Luke 13:3] ... "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? [Matthew 23:33]**

The TRUE Gospel of Christ makes no apologies to sinners and does not seek to make them comfortable.
It seeks to shake them up to the very core of their souls!!!

"And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." [Rev. 20:15]
"And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night" [Rev. 14:11]
"Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure." [Psa. 2:1-5]

Sinners are saved by hearing the word of God, and not necessarily a scripted set of verses like those that make up the popular tracts of today such as "4 Spiritual Laws", "The Roman's Road", "God's Bridge To Eternal Life", or "Steps To Peace With God". All those tracts put the cart before the horse because they tell the unsaved, unregenerated, spiritually dead sinner to DO something to get themselves saved. The writers of those tracts apparently don't realize that the Bible verses they are quoting can only apply to people who already have the spirit of God in them and so those verses are referring to FRUITS or EVIDENCES of salvation, not CAUSES of or PRECURSORS to salvation.

God desires that his preachers use ***the law of God*** (Romans 3:20) to inform sinners that they are indeed violators of His law. Then, if it is God's will to save a particular individual at a particular time, the Holy Spirit will bring conviction upon that sinner and God will remove the sinner's heart of stone and replace

it with a heart of flesh, at which point the sinner will become a new creation, born-again, without needing to say a sinner's prayer and without having to walk down an aisle or sign a decision card. It will all have been the work of God's grace and mercy alone. PERIOD! And that sinner, once he or she becomes a new creature in Christ, will want to repent (turn away from sin and seek God's kind of holiness) and will be able to really repent and will be able to believe in Christ, the REAL Jesus Christ who saves sinners without having to wait for the sinner to accept Him. Once a sinner is Born Again, they will want to accept Christ ***and*** His Lordship in their lives. But prior to that point they are spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1) and completely unable to turn to God (Romans 3:11, 8:7-8).

Dear Sinner, have YOU passed God's litmus test? Do YOU have true salvation that depends on Christ alone and not on what you accepted or did not accept or prayed or did not pray? Has God convicted you of the depth of your sin? Has he shown you His hatred for sin and His love of righteousness? Has He shown you your complete inability to save yourself or even contribute towards your salvation. Has the thrice-holy God of the Bible shown you just how lost and undone you are and your complete dependency upon His grace and mercy alone?

"For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness,
have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God."
[Romans 10:3]

Do not fall for the lies of the free-will gospel. Search the scriptures and not just the ones the free-willers quote! Your pastor may think that spiritually dead unsaved sinners have the power to come to Christ of their "own free-will" but the God of the Bible says they are lost and undone and slaves to sin until and unless God grants them repentance (see Acts 11:18). And that kind of repentance (turning from sin) is only the work of a regenerated soul for which only God can take credit. The unsaved have no will and no power to worship God in spirit and in truth. Their will is bent towards sin and self-righteousness. The unregenerated may be able to worship God in self-righteousness but not with Christ's righteousness. The spiritually dead may have the will and the power to choose between false Gods (Joshua 24:15) but they have no ability to come to Christ for eternal life (John 6:44).

Final note: Too many professing Christians are allowing error - very serious error regarding the Gospel - to creep into the Church today. This tolerance of error is often done in the name of **unity**. God's people should avoid any unity that undermines the Gospel and other Biblical truths. Jesus told Pilate "I have come to bear witness unto the truth" (John 18:37). He did not say "I have come to bring unity". He said in fact "I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:24). We live in a day and age when hardly anybody, even in the body of Christ, wants to say anything confrontational, even to correct gross error. We think being non-confrontational is always a virtue, when in fact it is often the opposite. It is a sin that allows error to go on unchecked.

If you wish to learn more about the TRUE ***God-centered*** plan of salvation and how it differs from the FALSE ***man-centered*** "free-will" gospel, then please examine the articles at:
http://comingintheclouds.org/freewill/freewill.htm

Make sure that YOU pass the "Litmus test" for salvation. Make sure that YOU have the TRUE gospel!

* God (without the sinner's help or cooperation) can save a sinner on their deathbed, but most likely that happens a lot less often than people wish to believe. Even on a deathbed, a truly saved person would probably exhibit some kind of fruit (changed heart) if they are still able to communicate, just as the thief on the cross [Luke 23:43] who stopped mocking Christ as soon as God changed his heart. And isn't that indeed an amazing act of God... that a man nailed to a cross, in agony and about to die for his crimes, who just a short while earlier was lashing out at Christ, would have a change of heart! Dare we give the sinner any credit for that transformation? "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." [Jeremiah 13:23]

The Election Collection was compiled by Ray Kane - http://comingintheclouds.org