

Exposing “Calvinism Exposed”

A Biblical Response to Ron Vietti and Jim Crews

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Dedication

This booklet is dedicated to all the faithful Calvinist pastors of Bakersfield, California, who faithfully proclaim the gospel and evangelize the lost. Preach on, dear fellow-laborers. It is also dedicated to the precious saints who assemble so often together on Young Street. Your love for Christ and for the doctrines of grace shine like a light in the darkness and is evidenced by your tireless pursuit of living “in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.”

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The Occasion for Writing and Other Random Important Thoughts

"Listen God loves all you. You homosexuals, God loves you. You gangsters, God loves you. You strippers, God loves you. I hate to say it, but you Calvinists, God loves you too."

~Ron Vietti~

The Occasion for Writing

On Wednesday evening, October 1st, 2014, just 16 days ago from the moment I write this sentence, Pastors Ron Vietti and Jim Crews of Valley Bible Fellowship Church in Bakersfield, California, did a talk they entitled, "A Conversation about Calvinism." The link (since taken down) on their website called it, "Calvinism Exposed."

The crux of the issue is stated by Mr. Vietti and Mr. Crews: **"We believe in the divine sovereignty of God, we believe God chooses, our only problem with Calvinism is we don't think that God chooses without us choosing Him and everybody has that right. And so, those that choose God, he chooses them."**

Normally, I really pay no attention to what others are preaching. I generally keep my nose to the grindstone and shepherd the flock of God in our local assembly. But in this particular message, not only did Mr. Vietti and Mr. Crews mention Calvinist churches in Bakersfield (one of which I pastor), he stated the following: **"There are a lot of Calvinist churches in Bakersfield. I'm not going to name them, but [the] war is not against them personally."** — But at the end of their message, they state, **"You be careful because you don't want to attend a church that has that belief system."** And he issued a directive to the precious people attending VBF, a directive to challenge fellow believers in a non-loving, confrontational manner: They said, **"Ask other Christians, 'Do you believe in divine election the way John Calvin believed in it?' That's a yes or no question. But**

they won't answer with a yes. They'll say, 'what we mean is...' After they say that, the conversation is over." Finally, they have stated that Calvinist churches are proclaiming no good news whatsoever: Speaking of the gospel, they said, **"What's the good news about that message they [Calvinist churches] have? None."**

My goal is not to change Mr. Vietti's and Mr's Crews's minds. When you pastor a church the size of VBF, it can become very challenging to ever change your position on anything. My goal is to (a) defend the truth of Scripture and (b) encourage the all Christians to be good Bereans ("they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so" [Acts 17:11]) – to test everything deeply with Scripture, and not just with a few quick references given by your pastor. At our church, we work very hard to educate our people in the Scriptures and I *never ever* ask them to just take my word for it just because I said something into a microphone.

Random Important Thought #1:

I am relatively new to the Bakersfield community, so I asked around a little about the reputation of Valley Bible Fellowship. I heard nothing but wonderful comments. I wrote some of them down:

- "They are good people who do a lot for the community."
- "They have a real love for the most unlovable people."
- "They love children and have a fabulous ministry to children."
- "VBF is filled with warm, caring people."

So I praise the Lord that this is (at least from my informal inquiries) is the reputation of the church.

Random Important Thought #2:

To be as accurate as possible, I will use actual word-for-word quotes from a transcript we had made of the message by Mr. Vietti and Mr. Crews. The transcript was made with the utmost care and respect for being accurate and rightly representing exactly what they said. I believe it is unethical and sinful to intentionally misrepresent the views of another person, so I will do my very best to remain true to the context and the intent of the speakers and to genuinely represent their views. Any quotations I use will be used according to the context and not just random sound bytes that change the intended meaning.

This was a conversation between Mr. Vietti and Mr. Crews. For the sake of efficiency, in most cases, I won't bother to say who says what since they both agree with each other. I want to focus primarily on statements they put forward as factual and test them against Scripture and against the real history of Calvinism. Just as a note, there were historical inaccuracies given by Mr. Vietti and Mr. Crews in regards to John Calvin himself, but these have been addressed in a different forum by another pastor in Bakersfield. For the sake of space and readability, the rest of this booklet will respectfully substitute "V/C" for "Mr. Vietti and Mr. Crews." Please read "V/C" as a respectful notation to save space.

Random Important Thought #3:

There is a theological depth to the issues brought up by V/C which cannot simply be dismissed by blanket statements which prove nothing. Even John Calvin himself often cautioned the student of theology to be careful and meticulous in the study of election and predestination. "If anyone with carefree assurance breaks into this place, he will not

succeed in satisfying his curiosity and he will enter a labyrinth from which he can find no exit.”¹

Random Important Thought #4:

V/C stated as part of their introduction, speaking of Calvinism: **“There is a doctrine that many churches in Bakersfield believe in, a lot of young pastors believe in. And this doctrine is the ugliest doctrine I’ve ever seen in my life.”** First of all, as one who is staring the half-century mark hard in the face, I want to express my gratitude for being included with the “young pastors.” But I do preach on Young Street in Bakersfield twice each Sunday, so perhaps that was the reference? On a more serious note, this statement might be construed to mean that Calvinism is the product of the youth and inexperience of those who teach it. I am neither young nor inexperienced and my decades of being a serious student of the Scriptures has only deepened my convictions. Sound doctrine is right whether you are teaching it at the age of 18 or 81.

Random Important Thought #5:

We produced this booklet in just the past few days, so I would ask the reader to please be forgiving with the undoubtedly numerous spelling, grammar, and formatting errors sure to be involved. The doctrine we present, however (short of typos), is something of which we are certain.

¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford Lewis Battles; Library of Christian Classics, XX-XXI (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 3.21.1.

The Characterization of Calvinism by Mr. Vietti and Mr. Crews

Again, I will respectfully refer to Mr. Vietti and Mr. Crews as V/C throughout the rest of this booklet. When it is necessary to point out an individual, I will do so. To begin with, I simply want to include some direct quotes from V/C to set the table for their viewpoint of Calvinism. I do not deny them their right to have these views and I do not include these to be inflammatory, but rather to accurately represent their view with direct quotes.

- Calvinism is **“bad doctrine.”**
- It **“has the potential of really, really hurting a lot of people.”**
- V/C say more than once that **“Their [Calvinists’] doctrine [is a] dirty little secret they don’t want anyone to know.” – “They are not going to tell you everything it teaches.” “Nobody wants to tell you what Calvinism stands for.”**
- **“Their doctrine states . . . that God only chooses a few. He only chooses some to have eternal life. His decision is based on whatever. We don’t know what it is based on. He chooses some to be saved, He chooses others to be born with the intention that they will suffer in hell forever and ever and God is glorified in that suffering.”**
- Characterizing what God might theoretically say under a Calvinist system: **“God is not the kind of God that says, ‘Eenie meenie miney moe, I’ll pick you, you, you. The rest of you I created with the intention of you burning in hell and I’ll be glorified as you burn.”**
- **“This doctrine is blasphemous; it’s unbiblical, it’s heresy. And I believe it is the doctrine of demons.”**
- **“They are knocking him [God] and saying He is cruel, and He’s like a heathen god.”**
- They accuse Calvinism as teaching to distraught teenagers, **“ ‘I can’t even turn to God because He hasn’t chosen me; He doesn’t love me.’ –I think potentially has the power to add to a lot of suicidal situations.”**

As we go through this material, it is my hope that this mischaracterization of Calvinism will be brought under the microscope of both scriptural and historical fact. There are some necessary preliminary corrections needed, however:

First, regarding V/C's claim made multiple times that churches that teach reformed doctrine (they state this as a synonym for Calvinism) **"don't want anyone to know [our] dirty little secret"** and **"nobody wants to tell you what Calvinism stands for."** Although I am not privy to the details of how other reformed churches in Bakersfield operate, frankly, Calvinists are more likely to shout Calvinism from the rooftops. Speaking for our church, I personally preach some concept from Reformed Theology in every single sermon I preach, and every other Friday night we disciple the adults in our church in systematic theology. The claim that Calvinists are trying to keep it a secret is patently false—we believe Reformed Theology, the doctrines of grace, and are fulfilling the command of 2 Timothy 4:2 to "preach the word."

Second, I am uneasy with the label that Calvinism is **"blasphemous and heresy."** Those are words associated with a completely false gospel which, if believed, will actually lead one away from Christ and not to Him. Furthermore, the **"doctrine of demons"** label comes from 1 Timothy 4:1, which in context is talking about those who completely abandon the biblical gospel and enter into ultra-legalistic and ascetic teaching, requiring essentially a works-based salvation. Calvinists may be accused of numerous things, but espousing a works-based salvation is never one of them, since that is precisely the opposite of historical Calvinism.

Third, the claim that Calvinists are **"knocking [God] and saying He is cruel . . . like a heathen god,"** is a major clue to me that V/C have not read the greatest writers of Calvinism. In addition, as we will deal with later, I believe this is an indication of a belief

that the justice and wrath of God are to be viewed as cruel, like a heathen God, when Scripture plainly teaches these attributes of God.

Finally, the claim that a person could attempt to turn to God for mercy and yet God would reject him (as per the teenager example given by V/C) will later be shown to be completely impossible according to Scripture.

John Calvin and Calvinism

“Calvinism” has become the term used to describe a particular belief system in the area of soteriology and has been boiled down to the famous acronym T.U.L.I.P.

- Total Depravity
- Unconditional Election
- Limited Atonement
- Irresistible Grace
- Perseverance of the Saints

Although I will use the term for this purpose before us, I am not personally a huge fan of the term “Calvinism” for two reasons. First, it implies that Reformed Theology is essentially limited to the five points related specifically to Election and Predestination. But Calvin wrote extensively on every aspect of soteriology: Grace, Atonement, Divine Calling, Conversion, Election, Perseverance, Regeneration, Justification, Sanctification, Glorification, and Union with Christ. In addition, he wrote vast material on the topics of Theology Proper, Pneumatology, Christology, Ecclesiology, Hamartiology, Anthropology, just to name a few. Also, he wrote detailed scholarly commentaries on 48 individual Bible books. Second, the term “Calvinism” implies that Calvinists blindly believe every single word that John Calvin ever wrote. John Calvin was a flawed sinner, knowing his own limitations.

John Calvin (Middle French “*Jean Cauvin*”), was born in 1509 sixty miles north of Paris. Trained originally as a lawyer, he was an example to all in ministry regardless of theological leanings. He was a pastor, theologian, teacher, and writer. Ministering in Geneva, Switzerland, he worked tremendously long hours on behalf of his local church, preaching multiple times per week. As mentioned above, he was amazingly prolific as a writer: His best known and most influential work is his *Institutes of the Christian*

Religion – the first edition in 1536 when he was 27 years old. The totality of his writing fills 71 thick volumes, making him among the most productive writers in the history of the Christian church. It is unfortunate that the popular understanding of John Calvin has been reduced to his writing on election only. His contribution to Christian theology is immense, however, and many people who say they disavow all love of John Calvin likely do not even know how his influence in other areas of theology may have indirectly contributed to their own understanding of theology.

And what those who have not read Calvin fail to point out is that he was so utterly biblical and thorough in his writing. He didn't make up doctrine; he expounded on what he found in Scripture. Disagree with him if you like, but his writing is saturated with Scripture and extremely sound logic. Admittedly, many say they are Calvinists without having actually read anything by John Calvin *and* on the other side, many anti-Calvinists have never read anything by John Calvin. Burk Parsons writes humorously of Calvinists who limit themselves to the five points, that "they have perhaps found themselves prancing gleefully amid a valley of bright red tulips, but have not lifted their heads to behold the lush green forests and glorious mountains all around them."²

On a personal level, what we often do not realize is that Calvin was not a mean-spirited codger laughing maniacally as he wrote things to scare Christians to death. He was equally concerned with engendering a true devotion to the Biblical God, a pursuit of every possible nuance of the doctrines of God and of Grace, and the entire personal surrender to the glory of God in all things. He writes, "The glory of God so shines in his word, that we ought to be so affected by it, whenever he speaks by his servants, as though he were near to us, face to face."³ He was a man with a reputation of gentle, loving care

² Burk Parsons, "The Humility of Calvin's Calvinism," in *John Calvin: A Heart for Devotion, Doctrine, and Doxology*, ed. Burk Parsons (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2008), 4.

³ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948-50), 4:343.

for the church. Throughout his ministry, he wrote more than twelve hundred letters answering theological questions, giving advice to hurting local churches, offering joy and encouragement to friends, and rich words of comfort to the grieved and distressed. He was known for his particularly tender shepherd's touch with those grieving the death of loved ones.⁴

⁴ W. Robert Godfrey, "The Counselor to the Afflicted," in John Calvin: A Heart for Devotion, Doctrine, and Doxology, ed. Burk Parsons (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2008), 87.

A Word about Bible Study Methodology (Hermeneutics)

V/C do make a note about the method they use in utilizing Scripture to back up their views: **“There is a word you must learn and it is exegesis...exegesis means you take something over here and over here and over here and put it together to make a whole.”** Not only is their definition of exegesis completely ambiguous, but what they are actually defining is *eisegesis*. *Exegesis* is based on a Greek word that means “to lead out of.” It is the art and science of careful, objective analysis. *Eisegesis* means “to lead into,” in which the interpreter starts with a preconceived idea, then injects his own ideas into the text to make it mean what he wants it to mean. When used with multiple verses on one topic, this can also be called “proof-texting.”

Exegesis includes many considerations of a given verse: We start first with general principles then proceed to specific skills. General principles would include the following:

- *Exegesis* starts with the assumption of the perspicuity of Scripture, meaning that Scripture makes itself abundantly clear on every single area that God wants us to fully understand. He repeats Himself in multiple ways in multiple places in multiple genres of literature in Scripture to give this abundant clarity.
- We also take into consideration progressive revelation, that what God may give in general form earlier in Scripture He gives in more detail as redemptive history progresses. For example, Genesis 2:24 gives the general foundation for marriage, while the New Testament sheds detailed light on the subject.
- We take into account that Scripture interprets Scripture, that the less clear references are aided in interpretation by the more clear references to the same subject.
- We also hold to Analogy of Faith, that there is a unified harmony to Scripture. Even passages that seem to teach two different things will fit together in a

coordinated and complementary fashion. Any given passage of Scripture has one basic proper interpretation rather than a surface interpretation plus secret deeper meanings. This does not preclude the use of multiple legitimate applications nor does it preclude such concepts as near/far fulfillment of prophecy.

- We include sensitivity to the historical situation of the original writer and reader rather than reinterpreting a text based solely on later revelation. For example, to say that “David trusted Jesus when he battled Goliath” is historically inaccurate; David did not know the name of Messiah to come.
- We value the checking principle, that God gave the church scholars for hundreds of years and their input has value. Of particular value is to read opposing viewpoints on a given passage and judge the method by which their conclusions were reached.
- It also includes dealing systematically and consistently with parables, figurative language (similes, metaphors, allegory, and parable), symbolism, typology, prophecy, literary genre, and the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament.

Specific working skills would include the following:

- We hold to the priority of original languages. This is far beyond just looking up the dictionary meaning of a word in Greek or Hebrew. It means taking into consideration language/culture-specific idioms, word order which indicates importance and emphasis, and exact wording to determine the legitimacy of cross references. This can also include lexical analysis (word meanings) and syntactical analysis (word relationships to one another). At a more detailed level, it involves the consideration of verb forms (for example, in Greek there are five categories of verb analysis with at least 13 sub-categories). This does not mean that in order to properly understand Scripture, you have to be trained in original languages. What it does mean, however, is that when forming major doctrines upon which the gospel stands or falls, this is an essential element.

- The consideration of context is imperative. This includes nearest context (the words immediately before and after) all the way to the book context (the purpose of the Bible book as a whole). This cannot be ignored.
- The intent of the author is a major consideration. What is the purpose of the book and what was the author trying to accomplish? This proves highly beneficial to ascertaining the proper interpretation of a text. How does the text at hand contribute to this purpose?
- Historical considerations matter. Geography, history, political circumstances, social circumstances, family customs, financial customs, and cultural norms all make a difference in interpretation.

Although claiming to utilize *exegesis*, V/C showed no evidence of this, and in fact gave a textbook example of *eisegesis*, starting with a pre-conceived position followed by stringing together as many verses as possible that on the surface prove their point. For example, a person could start with the proposition, “God hates dogs,” and find about 40 verses in the Bible in which dogs are spoken of in disparaging terms. V/C started with a doctrinal presupposition then proof-texted their way through Scripture rather than genuinely considering each text with the criteria I stated above.

Their method was basically a “we have more verses than you do” method (my words, not theirs). As they state from a direct quote: **“Here’s the thing about Calvinism, they just have a few verses they go on and we can explain every one of their verses.”** With all due respect, our understanding of soteriology is not determined by who has the most verses, but since V/C did state that Calvinists have only a few verses, let me state for the record that in my short and completely inadequate defense of Calvinism, I will use or reference approximately close to 300 verses, and this is just the tip of the iceberg. The claim that “[Calvinists] **just have a few verses**” is a made-up so-called fact to convince their hearers of the legitimacy of their position. What they defined as “exegesis” was in fact exactly the opposite, and patently an irresponsible use of God’s Holy Revelation.

In looking through the message by V/C, I chose to deal with 18 issues (including T.U.L.I.P.) related to Calvinism that were directly referenced or challenged by V/C.:

1. What is the Nature of Human Free Will?
2. Does God Choose Some for Salvation? (Election)
3. Does God Choose the Elect Based on Their Choice of Him?
4. Does God Choose Some for Reprobation? (Does He Choose Some for Hell?)
5. Is Predestination Unjust?
6. Does Calvinism Take Away Human Responsibility?
7. How Does Election, Free Will, and Human Responsibility Work Together?
8. Do Calvinists Believe that God Sends Babies to Hell?
9. Does Calvinism Lead to Pride?
10. Is God Glorified by Those Who Will Be in Hell?
11. Is Total Depravity True?
12. Is Unconditional Election True?
13. Is Limited Atonement True?
14. Is Irresistible Grace True?
15. Is Perseverance of the Saints True?
16. Does Calvinism "Stifle Evangelism?"
17. Do Calvinists Believe God is the Author of Sin?
18. Is the Message Given by Mr. Vietti and Mr. Crews Consistent with the Biblical Gospel?

What is the Nature of Human Free Will?

What is the nature of the human will? Is our will something that is completely independent or the other extreme, are we just robots at the mercy of a fatalism designed by God who has no regard for our wishes and desires? V/C say they believe in the sovereignty of God, but this is their characterization of how Calvinists view this – characterizing God as saying, **“Okay, I’m going to set it up for you to have free will, you’re going to be able to choose, this idea where you’re going to be making choices but I have a purpose and predestined you not to be chosen and I’ve created you so that you’re going to go to hell, but I’m going to choose to rescue some.”** In other words, even a person who really wants to go to heaven and really wants to worship God is out of luck, so to speak, if God has already decided their eternal destiny.

Most Christians affirm some level of God’s sovereignty and some level of human free will.⁵ The question regarding free will, however, becomes sticky when trying to define the nature of free will.

First, the term “determinism” has been wrongly equated with “fatalism.” There is a clear distinction. Fatalism is “an inherent necessity in the way things are so that they could not be any other way.”⁶ Determinism is the fact that events are causally determined by God, but that this does not preclude the ability of a human to act according to genuine desires. A person is morally responsible for his actions because the actions are according

⁵ John S. Feinberg, “God Ordains All Things,” in *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom*, ed. David Basinger and Randall Basinger (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1986), 34.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

to and consistent with the desires of the person. The action was causally determined by God, but because it fits the longing of the individual, it is in that sense a free action.⁷

Only God is sovereign and therefore only God is truly free. To speak of a human having any sort of complete freedom is a contradiction to the dependence of humanity upon the one truly free Being.⁸ The default desire of all human-kind is to reject God, and that the ability to choose God must first be given by God. That choice is still within the realm of the person's desire, however. Unbelievers are not able of their own volition to make the choice to choose salvation. Man is dead in sin (Eph 2:1, Col 2:13), a slave to unrighteousness (John 8:34; Rom 6:6, 17, 20), alienated from God (Col 1:21), hostile toward God (Rom 5:10; 8:7), spiritually blind (2 Cor 4:4), held captive (2 Tim 2:26), trapped in Satan's domain (Col 1:13), powerless to change (Jer 13:23; Rom 5:6), unable to please God (Rom 8:8), and unable to comprehend spiritual truth (1 Cor 2:14). "Although the human will is involved in coming to Christ (since no one is saved apart from believing the gospel . . .), sinners cannot come to Him of their own free will . . . God irresistibly draws to Christ only those whom He chose for salvation in eternity past (Eph 1:4-5, 11)."⁹ No one comes to Christ against his will and with resigned disgust at feeling forced to do so. It is a free action made possible by the election of God and the opening of the eyes of the spiritually blind (Is 42:7).

In summary, the free will of mankind is expressed in the fact that we freely and consistently choose to sin and turn away from God: "As it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one' " (Romans 3:10-12). So to be able to choose salvation and choose to follow God, that natural sinful tendency must

⁷ Ibid., 37.

⁸ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1986), 360.

⁹ John MacArthur, Jr., *John 1-11*, MNTC (Chicago: Moody Press, 2006), 253.

be abrogated by God. This does not nullify the fact that once God has opened the eyes of the spiritually blind (Is 42:7), the choice they make to repent and follow Christ is a real choice with the real consequence of salvation and eternal life. As stated above, the action was causally determined by God, but because it fits the longings of the individual, it is in that sense a free action.

Does God Choose Some for Salvation? (Election)

As noted earlier, the crux of the issue is stated by V/C: **“We believe in the divine sovereignty of God, we believe God chooses, our only problem with Calvinism is we don’t think that God chooses without us choosing Him and everybody has that right. And so, those that choose God, he chooses them.”** So we have common ground in the belief that God chooses. This is an incomplete definition, but we will add more weight to it as we progress.

Proponents of total human freedom argue that election and human will must necessarily be in competition with one another. Sovereign individual election cancels out human will, or human will at least diminishes the totality of sovereign election. In fact, some will deny that there is any mystery to this at all and even decry the idea of the doctrine of election containing any difficult elements. One author calls it “theological tyranny of the worst kind . . . to assert that lying behind the open gospel of the grace of God there exists more important, but inaccessible, super-secret knowledge never revealed to anyone in this age.”¹⁰ I, for one, would be hesitant to say there are no more mysteries in Scripture concerning election. Just the fact that this debate has been waged by men who will likely all be in heaven proves the mystery and heights of this issue. In Romans 8:28-30 Paul does not attempt to explain how divine sovereignty and so-called free will are related to one another. Paul simply asserts that “God is the author of our salvation, and that from beginning to end. We are not to think that God can take action only when we graciously give him permission.”¹¹

¹⁰ William G. MacDonald, “The Biblical Doctrine of Election,” in *The Grace of God, The Will of Man: A Case for Arminianism*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1989), 225.

¹¹ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), 332.

Let's start with a working definition of election: "Election is God's sovereign choice of those He has determined to comprise His holy people."¹² Some of the major reasons John Calvin believed in predestination, the election of believers to salvation are as follows:¹³

- Israel's national election in the Old Testament – He cites Deut 7:6-8; Psalm 47:4a; Ps 33:12
- Calvin understood that there is a difference between God's election of Israel as a nation and the predestination of individuals for salvation. "The Bible plainly shows that God discriminates between individuals by sovereign election and predestination."¹⁴
- He uses the example of Jacob and Esau from Romans 9, pointing out that both equally deserved to be condemned by God.
- He notes that there were no merits in either Jacob or Esau so why did God choose? Roman 9:15 "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

The fact that God *does* choose individuals is inescapable from Scripture. Just to highlight a few examples, all of which are taken in consideration of the contexts from which they are drawn:

- God sought after Adam and Eve after their sin and provided them with the covering of animal skins and with a temporary covering for their sin in the death of the animal (Gen 3:21). When their desire was to hide from God (Gen 3:10), God came after them and pursued them that he might provide a sacrifice for them.

¹² Steve Swartz, "The Interaction of Election, Free Will, and Human Responsibility in Salvation," unpublished paper, The Master's Seminary, 2011, 10.

¹³ Richard D. Phillips, "Election and Reprobation," in John Calvin: A Heart for Devotion, Doctrine, and Doxology, ed. Burk Parsons (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2008), 145–46.

¹⁴ Ibid., 145.

- God chose Abraham with no merits or reasons given (Gen 18:19)
- God chose Isaac and not Ishmael to be the bearer of God's promises (Gen 19:19 – 21; 21:12)
- God chose Jacob over Esau before they were born (Gen 25:23). More about this later.
- God chose Saul (soon to be Paul) in Acts 9. Saul was on his way to persecute Christians and Christ spoke audibly to him, making him fall to the ground, blinding him temporarily in the process. God told Ananias to help Saul and said, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15).
- Psalm 65:4 gives praise to God by stating "Blessed is the one you choose and bring near, to dwell in your courts!"
- Jesus said that "no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matthew 11:27).
- Jesus said that "the Son gives life to whom he will" (John 5:21).
- Paul stated that God "chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved." (Ephesians 1:4–6).
- Paul (the greatest champion of election of all time) wrote to the church at Thessalonica, "For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you," (1 Thessalonians 1:4).
- Peter exclaimed, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (1 Peter 1:3)¹⁵

¹⁵ Note that "caused us" is an aorist active participle meaning that God did the action and we were simply the recipients of the action.

- Jesus said in Matthew 22:14, “For many are called, but few are chosen.”
- Paul stated in Romans 9 (which will be dealt with later as well) that God has made known the riches of his glory to vessels of mercy “which he has prepared beforehand for glory” (v. 23).
- And of course, the crown jewel of election passages: “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” (Romans 8:28-30).

This is not a detailed treatment of these passages, but simply showing that Scripture is clear that God *does* choose people for salvation.

V/C argues against the Calvinist use of Romans 9, stating: **“Their other big text is in Romans 9 and they’ll use this one a lot.”** They go on to talk about Jacob and Esau and how this is simply talking about God choosing the descendants of Jacob and not the descendants of Esau (Edomites) from verse 13. They continue: **“He’s not talking about individuals Jacob and Esau; he’s talking about Israel and the Edomites.”**

There are two problems with their reasoning. First, even if the only reference here is to the nations of Israel and Edom, those nations are made up of individuals, so God is *still* choosing some individuals and not others. The second problem is the lack of consideration of the immediate context. Verse 10 says “when Rebekah had conceived children by one man” —speaking of the individuals. Verse 11 says that “though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad” —speaking of individuals. Yes, the nations come into play, but this argument does not eliminate the fact that God chose one *individual* over another *and* chose one *nation* over another.

So Scripture is clear that God chooses those who will be saved, but the more detailed question concerns the basis upon which God chooses: Does God choose the elect based on their choice of Him?

Does God Choose the Elect Based on Their Choice of Him?

Again, the crux of the issue presented by V/C: **“We believe in the divine sovereignty of God, we believe God chooses, our only problem with Calvinism is we don’t think that God chooses without us choosing Him and everybody has that right. And so, those that choose God, he chooses them.”** The quick answer to this is simple: Scripture never once says this. The choice of God is always presented as independent choice.

V/C state that **“One of their proof texts is Matthew 22:14, ‘For many are called but few are chosen.’ It is a very weak text”** (emphasis mine). How can they say this is a “weak text?” First, it is grammatically very simple, only seven words in Greek, and simple to interpret. Second, these are words spoken by Christ himself, making me personally hesitant to label it “weak.” Their basis for labeling Matthew 22:14 a “weak text” is their belief that Calvinists take it out of context: They state,

What’s wrong with that is the fact that that’s one verse taken out of context because that goes with, that is the moral of the story of a parable that Jesus gives us in Matthew 22. The parable is about a king and a king is able to do whatever he wants, correct, and he’s the king so he can do whatever he wants. So this king invites all the rich snobby people to a banquet that he had and they didn’t want to come, they were busy and had stuff on their schedules. So the king said I’m just going to go out and invite everyone who can make it, I don’t care who they are, the poor the disabled, whoever, because I want my banquet room to be full and I want everyone to enjoy this meal that I have prepared. So everybody is invited to this feast, except for the fact that some people refused the invitation. So the few that are chosen were the ones that were actually the ones that accepted the invitation to begin with. I have chosen the ones who have chosen to be here with me. Those are the chosen. So if you want to be chosen, accept the invitation and you will be chosen.

What V/C fail to note is the even larger context. This is a section of Matthew in which Jesus is responding to his rejection by Israel's religious authorities. In Matthew 21:23, the "chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, 'By what authority are you doing these things and who gave you this authority?'" Then Jesus told the parable of the two sons, asserting to the leaders at the end that "the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you." Then he told the parable of the tenants, an illustration of the disobedience and apostasy of Israel that was so clear to the listeners that "when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them" (Matt 21:45). *Now*, in the same literary section, Jesus tells the parable of the wedding feast, illustrating that those the King was inviting to the banquet—the Israelites and their leadership in Jesus day, shunned his invitation, so Jesus would now invite a different crowd, the Gentiles. The connection to the other parables is unmistakable. For example, in the parable of the tenants, the tenants of the vineyard treat the vineyard owner's representatives (i.e., the prophets of God) poorly and eventually kill the vineyard owner's son (i.e., Christ). In the parable of the wedding feast for the King's Son, those who refused to come to the banquet "seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them," deeply angering the King who destroyed those who refused to come. So the first point is that this is a bigger picture of God turning for a time to the Gentiles (see also Matt 12:15-18 for confirmation that Jesus would withdraw for a time from Israel and turn to the Gentiles).

Secondly, even not taking into considering the larger literary context, as I will point out in a later section, the sovereign choice of God does not eliminate human responsibility. Those who rejected the King's invitation proved how evil they were by murdering those who invited them to the banquet and were therefore, on the basis on their own sins, killed by the King.

Finally, this text does nothing to prove that God chooses those who choose him. In fact, it teaches *just the opposite*. "And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all

whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests” (Matt 22:10). Those who came to the banquet were not looking for or asking for an invitation. They were gathered from the roads.

Let’s return to our discussion of Romans 9, because V/C missed some of the best parts. After the discussion of Jacob and Esau, Paul quotes God as saying to Moses, ““I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” (Rom 9:15). In other words, the choice is completely God’s with no reference to merit of any kind, including making a choice of God. Verse 16 makes this abundantly clear: “So then it depends *not on human will* or exertion, but on God, who has mercy” (emphasis mine). But Paul does not stop there. After using Pharaoh in the account of Israel’s exodus from Egypt as an example of God’s sovereignty, Paul says in verse 18, “So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.” Again, this is not *reactive* in any way.

Driving his argument home with an illustration, Paul says, “Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory —” (Ro 9:21-23). By the way, as a side note of detail. The verb in the clause “prepared beforehand for glory” in reference to the saved is an active verb (προητοίμασεν--*proetoimasen*), meaning the subject (God) did the preparing for glory. The verb in the clause “prepared for destruction” in reference to the unsaved is a *passive* verb (κατηρτισμένα--*katertismena*), meaning that the implied direct object (the unsaved) did the preparing. The unsaved merited and prepared themselves for the judgment of God by virtue of their own sin and rebellion against Him.

Key Words in Regard to God's Choice

“Elect/Election” –A word often used is ἐκλογή (*ekloge*) and etymologically related words. In general Greek usage, it simply means “selection. In 1 Thessalonians 1:4, it is translated “chosen” (“For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you.”). In Romans 9:11, speaking of God’s choice of Jacob over Esau, it is translated “election” (“that God’s purpose of election might continue”). In this case, Paul “uses it for the divine selection in the history of the patriarchs”¹⁶ “Thus ἐκλογή lays emphasis on the free decision of God.”¹⁷

“Foreknowledge”: The assertion of V/C is that election means that God knew who would choose him, and once they chose him, they were now chosen. This would have to mean that “foreknowledge” is passive in nature, that it simply means God *knew* who would choose Him but did not *cause* them to choose Him. A careful examination of “foreknowledge” shows just the opposite, however. The word the New Testament uses is προγινώσκω (*proginosko*) (verb form = “foreknew”). In Romans 8:29, foreknowledge is linked directly to predestination. In 1 Peter 1:2, foreknowledge is linked to election. It is most often used to signify *foreordination and predetermination*, as the following examples show:

- “This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and **foreknowledge** of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men” (Acts 2:23). No one would doubt that it was God’s purposeful plan for Christ to be crucified. Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 tell us this prophetically. God did not just happen to *know* that Christ would be crucified but not be the instrumental cause of this sacrifice.

¹⁶ Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 179.

¹⁷ Ibid.

- Similarly, speaking of the redemptive plan of God in Christ, Peter states that “He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you” (1 Peter 1:20). No one would say that God passively just *knew* that Christ would be made manifest; this was His definite plan, as Acts 2:23 says, God’s “*definite plan*.”
- *Proginosko* is also used to speak of foreordination and predetermination in Romans 8:29, Romans 11:2, and 1 Peter 1:2. Only *twice* in the New Testament is the term used of foresight or knowing in advance (Acts 26:5; 2 Peter 3:17).

To be even more specific about the use of *proginosko* in Romans 8:29 (“For those whom he *foreknew* he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”), we have to answer the challenge that foreknowledge simply means “foresight” in this case. This is the view that God looks down the tunnel of time and sees who will believe. Those who believe are the ones that God elects. In this sense, election is conditional. It is conditioned on the fact that a person must be seen to believe in order to be elected, but in this verse, the object of “foreknew” is not the *actions* of people, it is the people themselves. The Bible never speaks of our faith as being the reason for election. This, by the way, would leave open the theoretical possibility that no one would ever choose God or believe. And thus the cross would be for nothing and for no one.

John Calvin made a stunning point in reference to the correct understanding of “foreknowledge.” “In this sense he says in the same chapters that Christ as ‘a lamb’ ‘was foreordained before the creation of the world,’” (1 Pet. 1:19, 20). What could have been more frigid or absurd than to have represented God as looking from the height of heaven to see whence the salvation of the human race was to come?” In other words, if “foreknowledge” is just passive and not an active cause, then God simply *observed* inertly that Christ was the means of salvation.

“Predestine”: The word translated “predestine” is προορίζω (*proorizo*). It is used six times in the NT “in the sense “to foreordain,” “to predestinate.” Since God is eternal and has ordained everything before time . . . the omniscient God has determined everything in advance, both persons and things in salvation history, with Jesus Christ as the goal.”¹⁸ It means “to come to a decision beforehand — ‘to decide beforehand, to determine ahead of time, to decide upon ahead of time.”¹⁹ So when Ephesians 1:5 says that God “predestined us for adoption as sons” it means he decided ahead of time. When Ephesians 1:11 says that we have been “predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,” it means He came to a decision beforehand. When Romans 8:29 says that “those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son,” it means that God determined this as Ephesians 1:4 says, “before the foundation of the world.” In the view of V/C, God’s grace is given based on the merits and worthiness of the recipient of grace, since God only give grace based on the foreseen wise choice of Him yet to be made. But based on our objective understanding of the passages we have already discussed, faith and belief cannot be the *cause* of election but must be the *result* of election.

And, to bring it back to the issue brought up by V/C, what about those who cannot choose God? What about unborn babies, infants, the completely mentally incapacitated? If you say that salvation is based solely on free choice, when what about those who can’t choose? *It is NOT the Calvinist position which would condemn them, but rather the “we must choose” position which condemns those incapable of choice.*

¹⁸ Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 456.

¹⁹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 359; H.G. Liddell, *A Lexicon: Abridged from Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English Lexicon* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996), 682.

To reiterate my first point, there is never an indication in Scripture that God chooses those who will choose Him. Scripture never says “God chose Abram because Abram chose him.” How could Israel choose God before Israel even existed? Certainly the Apostle Paul did not choose Christ; Christ knocked him to his face and chose *him*.

Does God Choose Some for Reprobation? (Does He Choose Some for Hell?)

It is important to be reminded that it is presumptuous to believe that God owes us anything. That is like Hamlet trying to speak off the pages of Shakespeare that he doesn't like the script written about his life. It is like Mickey Mouse trying to tell Walt Disney he doesn't like how Mickey is drawn. Or as Paul says, "will the molded say to its molder, 'Why have you made me like this?'" Man-centered thinking is what leads to man-centered theology. What *is* owed to us is the wages for our sin: death. It is not shocking that God condemns men to hell, what is shocking is that he doesn't condemn *all* men to hell. "But it's not fair!" some will cry. What *really* is not fair is God in the form of a man, perfectly sinless and pure in all respects, dying a criminal's death He did not deserve. So from the outset, let us be reminded that God owes us nothing except the just payment for our sin.

The characterization that we seem to get from V/C is the picture of a world full of innocent people, some of whom God chooses for heaven and some for hell. They even characterize a fictitious person as saying to God at the end, "**I was good**" as a reason God should accept him. This is a dangerous picture because it appeals to human vanity and emotion.

I can certainly understand the natural human reaction to the thought that God might choose some for hell, but it's important to work through this scripturally and logically, not on the basis of emotional reaction or pictures of cute babies being shown before an anti-Calvinism sermon. Let's work through a process:²⁰

²⁰ My gratitude to Dr. Michael Vlach, lecture notes from The Master's Seminary, Fall 2012.

First, predestination is a biblical concept and to deny it altogether is deny the Bible. We have already demonstrated this in passages such as Romans 8:29 – 30, Ephesians 1:5 and 11, and others. Second, predestination obviously involves the election to salvation for some. We see, for example, in Acts 13:48 that the appointment (election) happened prior to belief: “And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.” Third, since God is sovereign over all it is not consistent with a belief in the sovereignty of God that His sovereignty would not extend in some fashion to the non-elect. *Unbelievers and their fate must somehow be linked to God’s plan and decree, so in some sense the non-elect are predestined for judgment.* But the million dollar question is, “How?”

There is a *certainty* of predestination for both the elect and the non-elect, but the *means* of giving certainty to both groups does not have to be the same. God ordains election *and* reprobation with equal sovereignty, but His means to do so is different for each group. A distorted view of election and reprobation—the view which V/C claim that all Calvinists hold to—is that the *means* for both is identical. This would ultimately be saying that God works *faith* in the heart of the elect and God works *sin* in the heart of the non-elect, that God coerces men to sin so that He won’t have to save them. This is a massive assault on the integrity and holiness of God. So here is the key: election is *unconditional*, based on the unmerited favor and grace of God despite what they may deserve. Reprobation, on the other hand, is *conditional*, based on what sinners have done and what they deserve. In fact, Romans 6:23 puts both these concepts together in one verse: “For the wages of sin is death [conditional, based on what sinners have done and deserve] but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord [unconditional, based on the unmerited favor and grace of God.]”

The point is that it is an inaccurate characterization of Calvinism to say that Calvinists believe that the lost are (a) innocent victims of God’s choice and (b) not fully deserving

of the judgment they will receive. The lost will be judged in reference to their full rebellion against God.

Is Predestination Unjust?

The complaint by some (and by inference V/C) is that if the reprobate person is already predestined to sin and condemnation, then it is not just or equitable for God to hold him accountable for his actions. I will point out three major fallacies with this view.

First, this is again assuming that mankind is born in total innocence and pictured as begging God for mercy yet He won't give it. We will deal with Total Depravity later in detail, but a simple observation of human history would lead one to reject the notion of moral human innocence.

Second, this is the theological fallacy of determining that because I don't *like* something or don't fully *understand* it, it must not be true. This leads to placing myself in judgment over God. God has revealed much about Himself to us in the Scriptures, but some concepts are beyond our grasp. For example, how do we explain that God is the author of the Gospel of Matthew and that Matthew is the author of Matthew? How do we explain that Jesus is 100% God and 100% man? These are clear biblical teachings that we believe but are not able to fully connect all the dots. God does things that shock us and go beyond what we believe God *ought* to do in our limited sin-tainted judgment. For example, when Habakkuk complained to God about the inequities and injustice in Judah, God answered that He agreed with Habakkuk's assessment – and God's solution was to tell Habakkuk that He would raise up “the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation” to come and utterly crush and destroy Judah (Hab 1:6 – 7). Habakkuk was so shocked by this that his recap of these events in chapter three indicate that he got sick to his stomach, his knees got shaky, his lips started quivering, and his whole body trembled.

Finally, The condemnation of the reprobate is perfectly just as proven by a brilliant argument set forth by John Calvin himself: “Let all the sons of Adam come forward; let them quarrel and argue with their Creator that they were by his eternal providence bound over before their begetting to everlasting calamity. What clamor can they raise against this defense when God, on the contrary, will call them to their account before Him?”²¹ In other words, all who would argue with God that He has unjustly condemned them have only to look at the evidence of their own lives to see that His reprobation is completely justified since “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23).

²¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford Lewis Battles; Library of Christian Classics, XX-XXI (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 3.23.3.

Does Calvinism Take Away Human Responsibility?

Few would deny the reality of human responsibility. Moral choices and eternal destinies of humans are the responsibility of the individual.²² After Eve disobeyed God, He asked her in Genesis 3:13, “What is this that you have done?” Similarly, God indicted Adam in verse 17. But how can mankind, now in a state of total depravity, be held responsible to come to God in salvation? Total depravity is a condition that makes a decision to come to Christ impossible on one’s own, and therefore completely the work of God. While this is true, this does not negate human responsibility. “Our state of ignorance and depravity is . . . willful.” Romans 6:16 states that humans willingly obey sin. Romans 1:18 is clear that mankind willfully suppresses the truth.

In Scripture, human responsibility for salvation is connected to the will of God. In John 1, Jesus is portrayed as the light. 1:7 states that John the baptizer “came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.” Jesus came and enlightened all men (verses 7, 9). Human responsibility is clear in verse 12: “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” But then verse 13 marries this to God’s will: “Who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” The conclusion is that every man is responsible “to reject (v.11) or accept (v.12) [salvation], yet those who do accept it are ‘born of God’ (v.13).”²³ God’s wrath comes “from man’s rebellion . . . man cannot escape

²² Norman Geisler, “God Knows All Things,” in *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom*, ed. David Basinger and Randall Basinger (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1986), 64.

²³ Grant R. Osborne, “Soteriology in the Gospel of John,” in *The Grace of God, The Will of Man: A Case for Arminianism*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1989), 244.

responsibility for his fitness for destruction.”²⁴ Human responsibility is real, and it is tied to the will of God.

Romans 10:9-10 makes human responsibility to believe clear: “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” Jesus’ preaching consisted of a clear message: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mark 4:17). He said that “if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). Calvin himself affirms human responsibility: The “forgiveness of sins never can be obtained without repentance, because none but the afflicted, and those wounded by a consciousness of sins, can sincerely implore the mercy of God”²⁵

²⁴ James Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, WBC, Vol. 38a (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 567.

²⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.4.3

How Does Election, Free Will, and Human Responsibility Work Together?

It is a fallacy that election completely denies the responsible will of man altogether. Look how Jesus presents both in John 6:

Divine Election	Human Responsibility	Both Together
"All that the Father gives me will come to me." (v. 37)	"Whoever comes to me . . . whoever believes in me." (v. 35)	"This is the work of God [election], that you believe [responsible will] in him who he has sent." (v. 29)
"All that He has given me." (v. 39)	"Everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life." (v. 40)	"No one can come to me [responsible will] unless the Father who sent me draws him [election]." (v. 44)
	"Whoever believes has eternal life." (v. 47)	

So how do we explain the interaction of these three concepts? First, it is clear that there is an interaction between election, free will, and human responsibility. God has expressed a desire to save all men.²⁶ This interaction might be termed a tension, but this is only from a human standpoint.

Second, I reject the notion that this interaction must be fully comprehensible to be true. Human responsibility is clearly taught by Christ, yet a person's decision does not by itself bring about salvation, since the believer must be born of God (John 1:13). Therefore, "sovereignty and responsibility exist side by side."²⁷ Words like "yet" and "however" are

²⁶ Grant R. Osborne, "Soteriology in the Gospel of John," in *The Grace of God, The Will of Man: A Case for Arminianism*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1989), 244.

²⁷ Ibid.

useful in giving mankind the fullest picture possible of this dichotomy. The conversion of the lost is a drawing act of God, yet the convert came to Christ by way of a decision made in faith.²⁸

Third, Jesus came as the light of the world, drawing all people to the Father, yet not all are saved. This is not a failure on God's part to save some of the elect, but rather that Christ's death on the cross was *sufficient* for the whole world, but was "*efficient* only for the elect" (emphasis mine).²⁹ Even among Calvinists, there is debate over the intricacies of this issue, but Calvinists agree that God is the author of salvation and mankind is responsible to believe, since this is what Scripture says.

Fourth, as outlined earlier, I reject the idea of a completely free human will, since this has implications for the character of God. If a human is allowed complete free decision, this makes God dependent upon human will and does not fit the model of a totally sovereign God.³⁰ From a human standpoint, freedom of choice exists. This is governed, however, by God's overall decree. "Since God's decree covers all things, it must include both the ends God envisions as well as the means to such ends. God includes whatever means are necessary to accomplish his ends in a way that avoids constraining the agent to do what is decreed. Human actions are thus causally determined, but free."³¹ God is in control of all that happens, and under the umbrella of that control exists the responsibility for moral actions that humans legitimately possess.³²

Fifth, salvation is the working together of many elements. It is not necessary to argue which element wins over the others. "Election alone does not result in the salvation of

²⁸ Ibid., 256.

²⁹ Ibid, 257.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Feinberg, "God Ordains All Things," 29.

³² Geisler, "God Knows All Things," 65.

people.”³³ A person must have faith in order to be saved and must have knowledge of Christ in order to have faith. The elements necessary for salvation are “election, the death of Christ, testimony of His death, and personal faith.”³⁴ Election, free will, and human responsibility come together as a package deal.

³³ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 363.

³⁴ Ibid.

Do Calvinists Believe that God Sends Babies to Hell?

I do have to say V/C's use of pictures of babies as they were starting their talk had a definite implication, that Calvinists don't care what happens to babies. In fact, they stated such as they were showing the pictures: **"The doctrine says we are created by God with the intentions that we are going to burn in hell. And He will be glorified when we are burning in hell. Wrong! This doctrine is called Calvinism."** They also stated that **"if you go to a church that believes like that and you ask them to pray for your little sister's baby, deep in their mind if they think that baby is not chosen you'll probably not get a lot of prayer."**

Within Reformed Theology there are differing beliefs, including that elect babies go to heaven and that non-elect do not. However, the prevailing view in the evangelical church today is that all babies who die go to heaven. This is a view held by recognizable Calvinists such as Al Mohler and John MacArthur. There are differing reasons for this belief, but it is a completely false characterization to broadly state that Calvinists believe babies go to hell and that because of this, we don't really care about them.

Just to illustrate, here are 10 reasons I personally believe babies go to heaven (and this includes those incapable of making moral choices, such as the severely mentally handicapped).

1. Infants (and I would argue small children and mentally handicapped, etc), although sinful by nature, have not actively rebelled against God. God will clearly judge the lost based on their actions (Rev 22:12). An infant, though born under the curse of sin, has not yet shaken his fist at God. In Jeremiah 19:4, God calls children

killed at an early age "innocents." This doesn't mean they don't have a sin nature, but were not yet capable of rejecting God.

2. God describes children as "having no knowledge of good and evil" (Deut 1:39). They have a sin nature, but while they are automatically drawn to sin, they do not actively seek out and run to sin like adults do (See also Jonah 4:11). Adults sin because they know the truth and reject it outright (Rom 1:18)—infants and small children sin because they don't have the ability to discern right from wrong—this is a massive difference.
3. God in his mercy can ordain that all in this category are elect. The Westminster Confession affirms this belief as well.
4. My favorite reason is that infants go to heaven simply because of Christ's redemptive work on the cross. Charles Spurgeon said that "infants enter heaven as a matter of free grace with no reference to anything they have done."
5. Two examples of men chosen for salvation and confirmed in this before their births were John the Baptist and the prophet Jeremiah.
6. There is the case of King David's baby who died. David said with certainty that he would see his baby again (2 Sam 12:23). This was the response of a godly man confident in God's grace to his child.
7. I also believe this is one way God will insure that peoples from every tribe, tongue and nation are in heaven. Think about this: some tribe who has never heard the gospel yet has babies die is populating heaven with that very specific tribe.
8. Jesus blessed little children and there are no examples of Jesus ever blessing anyone in open rebellion against God. (Matt 18:3-5)
9. The major judgment passages of the New Testament include sins that infants are incapable of (sexual immorality, idolatry, drunkenness, etc) (1 Cor 6:9-10; Eph 5:5).
10. In Ezekiel 16:21, God described the slaughter of children born into pagan families as the slaughter of "My children." He claimed them all as His.

These are just ten reasons. If time permitted we could look at a minimum of a dozen more.

The characterization that the entire system of belief known as Calvinism can be summed up in a belief that all babies go to hell and God is happy about that is absolutely false and shows a stunning lack of research on the issue. This is a gross, dishonest, mean-spirited, and false characterization and Mr. Vietti and Mr. Crews owe an apology to the entire Christian community.

On several occasions, they portray Calvinists as believing that they know or have a pretty good idea as to who is chosen and who is not, as shown in the above quote, **“if you go to a church that believes like that and you ask them to pray for your little sister’s baby, deep in their mind if they think that baby is not chosen you’ll probably not get a lot of prayer.”** This is a mischaracterization of Calvinists and I would challenge Mr. Vietti and Mr. Crews to come up with one tangible example of a Calvinist who believes he can know who is chosen and who is not. They owe an apology to every Calvinist pastor and church in Bakersfield because he is accusing us of gross negligence in our duty to shepherd. There is not one of us who would ever counsel our congregation to *not* pray fervently for a sick baby. That is the height of absurdity to presume to know we would do this.

Does Calvinism Lead to Pride?

V/C stated that “[Calvinism] sets you up to have a better than them attitude because you are chosen and they are not. You’re in and they’re not.” Actually, it is quite the other way around: Those who believe and understand unconditional election tremble in gratitude to God for choosing them while those deluded by the belief that they *independently* arrived at a decision to come to faith must at some level congratulate *themselves* for being so smart for choosing God. This pride is also manifested in a belief that through human influence, a person can help decide how many people go to heaven. In other words, I have the power to get people closer to salvation by virtue of my personal influence apart from the gospel. In fact, this attitude was demonstrated near the close of V/C’s talk. Mr. Vietti said to Mr. Crews, **“You can close in prayer. Your altar calls get more people than me so you can close in prayer.”** This reveals a great faith in human ability to persuade.

John Calvin, on the contrary, urged great humility in response to election: He stated, “Let not the knowledge of predestination be hindered, in order that those who obey *may not be proud as of something of their own but may glory in the Lord*” (emphasis mine).³⁵ Calvin referenced the teaching of Augustine when he gave the primary reason predestination must be preached, “that he who has ears to hear of God’s grace may glory, not in himself but in God.”³⁶

Calvinism does not in and of itself lead to pride; pride is the natural root of all sin. A Calvinist who is prideful is not so because he is a Calvinist; he is prideful because he is a sinner and should confess the sin as such. Of all belief systems, Calvinism leaves the *least* for us to be proud of. Election should engender a sense of awe and gratitude at God’s

³⁵ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.23.13.

³⁶ Ibid.

glorious and sovereign plan to save. As Paul said about us as God's chosen, "But we ought *always to give thanks* to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, *because God chose you* as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth." (2 Thessalonians 2:13). And speaking of himself, we join Paul in saying simply, "But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." (Galatians 6:14).

Is God Glorified by Those Who Will Be in Hell?

Although this talk by V/C did not directly address the doctrine of hell, the tone of every mention of hell seemed to indicate a lack of belief or at least uncertainty about the reality of hell. In other teaching by Mr. Vietti viewed by this author on his church website, he indicated a lack of certainty about hell, repeating the phrase, “I don’t know” numerous times. If I am wrong about that assumption, I apologize. But for the sake of argument, however, the only point I am making is whether or not God is glorified by those who will be in hell. First we have to start with a defense of the doctrine of hell itself.

Throughout the New Testament, “hell” is the English translation for the word *Gehenna*, which is short for the “Valley of Hinnom” or the “Valley of the Sons of Hinnom.” This was the name given to the valley southwest of Jerusalem which was infamous for its sacrificial site called where children were offered to the god Molech during the tenure of wicked kings of Judah such as Ahaz and Manasseh (2 Chr. 28:3; 33:6). King Josiah put this practice to a stop (2 Kings 23:10) but the later generations may have started it up again (Jer. 7:31–32; 19:2–6; 32:35). As punishment, the prophet Jeremiah proclaimed that in the future this valley would be called the valley of slaughter since many would be slain there and the dead would be buried in Topheth (Jer 7:32; 19:6).

The Jews associated this place with the eternal punishment of the wicked. By the way, it is a myth that Jews did not believe in hell – they simply didn’t have as much revelation as we do in the New Testament. Extra-biblical Jewish literature tells us what they believed, however. This is not Scripture, but it is historically accurate concerning the beliefs of the time. First Enoch 54:1 says the place of judgment is “a deep valley burning with fire.” Second Enoch 10 describes it as a place of terror which includes a river of fire.

This is how Jesus used the term every time he mentioned it (for example, Matt 18:8 – 9, Mark 9:47 – 48). This was the use of *Gehenna* that Jesus taught in 11 different places in the gospels (and it is referenced in James 3:6 as well) as the place of eternal torment for the unsaved dead. In judging Gentiles at the end of the age, Christ will pronounce the sentence on the “goats” – those who rejected him. “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels’” (Matthew 25:41). The word “eternal” is the same Greek word used to describe “eternal life” in heaven just five verses later. Now, since V/C said in their talk that **“everything that is consistent with Jesus Christ in doctrine is true,”** I am certain we can all agree on the existence of an eternal place of torment for the unsaved dead, since Jesus taught this a dozen times. He also said it was the place where “their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:48), a quote from the very last verse of Isaiah. Seven times, Jesus says that the unsaved dead will experience “weeping and gnashing of teeth,” indicating that this is a conscience, awake punishment.

Paul states that the unsaved dead will “suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might” (2 Thessalonians 1:9). The writer of Hebrews affirms the reality of eternal judgment (6:2) and warns the unsaved church-attenders that if they “go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries” (Hebrews 10:26–27). And of course, the actual scene of the casting of the unsaved into hell is found in Revelation 20:13 – 14: “And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.”

On several occasions in their talk, V/C disparage the idea of God being glorified by those who have rejected Christ (“judged . . . according to what they had done” [Rev 20:14]) and will spend eternity in hell. But Scripture plainly says in Romans 9:22 that God desires “to show his wrath and to make known his power” to those who will be punished. If one has a problem with this truth about God, then one has a problem with the God of the Bible and has dared to pronounce judgment on God by trying to redefine Him to fit his own idolatrous image of a non-wrathful God.

In the Scriptures, God promises judgment to the unjust and the unrighteous so many times I do not even need to give references. But does Hell glorify God? Absolutely. He is glorified as the God who keeps His word. Because His justice is infinite, Hell shows his infinite just-ness. Hell will forever be a trophy to demonstrate God’s power to subdue all His enemies from all the ages. Hell will be the counterpoint to demonstrate how eternally merciful he is to those who trust in Him. It will be a vindication to all who suffered for Christ in the hearing or proclamation of God’s Word. Hell demonstrates for all time what Jesus saved us from when he died to redeem all who would trust in Him.

Is God glorified by those who will be in Hell? Infinitely. For us this seems like a terrible thought, but the temptation to stand in judgment over God is answered by God himself: “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?” (Job 38:2). “Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it” (Job 40:2). If we dare question God’s right and authority to punish the evil doer, our only appropriate response is to follow in Job’s footsteps and say to God, “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5–6).

Is Total Depravity True?

Before we address the five major points of Calvinism, I want to preface this with the fact that in no way is my brief presentation sufficient to fully explore the depths and wonder of these doctrines.³⁷ The information I will present is primarily a response to the particular shadows of doubt in each area that was cast by V/C.

V/C attacks total depravity, first by starting with an incomplete definition: **“the total inability of man to choose truth.”** A more inclusive definition is that Adam’s original sin was imputed to all humanity, and that the sin nature of Adam was transferred to every human. Original sin leaves us spiritually dead, impotent to reverse the effects of sin. We act on our sin nature without exception, rebelling against God in our thoughts, deeds, and words. To this end, we are unable to come to God unless God opens our spiritual eyes and ears and revives us to be able to have faith.

V/C characterizes the Calvinistic position on this issue by stating, **“Man, they say, is dead in their trespasses. So a dead person has no ability to respond to God”** (emphasis mine). Calvinists say it because God said it: “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience — among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind” (Ephesians 2:1–3).

V/C focus on the aspect of Total Depravity which renders us unable to *independently* choose God. They use the following as proof texts that the choice is ours and not God’s:

³⁷ I would commend the reader to David N. Steele, Curtis C. Thomas, and S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, and Documented*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Company, 2004).

- James 1:21 “Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.”
- Deuteronomy 30:19 “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live.”
- Psalm 119:30 “I have chosen the way of faithfulness; I set your rules before me.”
- Joshua 24:15 “And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”
- John 1:12 “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”

As stated earlier, Calvinists do not claim that there is no human responsibility, and these verses accurately portray that to come to faith in Christ, the elect must repent and turn away from sin, empowered to do so by God. The position V/C seem to be holding is that God looked down on neutral humanity, and arbitrarily decided to make some reject him and other believe in him. This is false. He looked down on humanity already steeped in sin and unbelief.

Total Depravity does not mean that all men are as bad or as sinful as they could be, but that our sin nature has invaded every part of our humanity: our body, our emotions, our spirit, mind, and will. Outside of God’s intervention, we can never obey God as we should or love Him with a totally pure heart. This view of humanity by no means started with John Calvin. Calvin was expounding what the Scriptures taught concerning this

topic, often referencing Augustine's teaching "that sinners are totally unable to obey God unless He intervenes by grace to free them from sin."³⁸

Of course, Augustine's prime opponent of this doctrine was the monk, Pelagius, who taught that mankind did not need divine grace and could choose God completely independently. Pelagianism was formally condemned as heresy by the Council of Ephesus (431). But immediately, a new version of Pelagianism became popular, which was a middle ground between total depravity and total freedom. What became known as Semi-Pelagianism says that human depravity is acknowledged, but mankind has enough inherent ability and goodness to grab ahold of saving grace independent of God. In other words, human initiative releases saving grace to the sinner rather than saving grace being the cause of salvation. Today, our more familiar label for this belief system is "Arminianism."

Why do Calvinists hold to Total Depravity?

- Our depravity is total because it is universal to all humans. "The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good. The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one" (Psalm 14:1-3). This is reiterated in even stronger terms in Romans 3:10 - 18.
- Our depravity is total because our will is depraved. "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing." (Romans 7:18-19; see also Rom 1:32).

³⁸ John MacArthur, "Man's Radical Corruption," in John Calvin: A Heart for Devotion, Doctrine, and Doxology, ed. Burk Parsons (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2008), 130 - 31.

- Our depravity is total because our mind is depraved. “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14; see also Rom 1:21; Eph 4:17-18).
- Our depravity is total because our heart is depraved. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9; see also Gen 6:5; Mark 7:21 – 23).
- Our depravity is total because we can do nothing whatsoever to please God. “Those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:8). “We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away” (Isaiah 64:6; see also John 6:44).

There can only be one reason for not believing Total Depravity: the inherent pride of man. We have a desire to believe we had to be smart enough or spiritual enough to come to God on *our* terms in *our* time.

As a final note of great interest about V/C’s position on Total Depravity, they quote Romans 10:17, which says that “faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” Here are their own words about what *they believe* happens then: **“You can be dead in your transgressions, but once you hear the message preached, faith will come into your heart, supernatural faith, and you have the ability to be saved.”** I hate to rain on their parade, but that is a wonderful description of Calvinism. Why does supernatural faith—something outside yourself—happen? Because God opens the heart to belief, like God “opened her [Lydia’s] heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul” in Acts 16:14. V/C accurately say they believe the Calvinist order of events: **“you hear the message preached, faith will come into your heart, supernatural faith, and you have the ability to be saved.”** This is precisely the order of events described in the conversion of the Gentiles in Acts 13:48: “And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and

glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.”
Notice the text does *not* say “and as many as believed were *then* appointed to eternal life!”
They were spiritual dead and God awakened them to believe.

Is Unconditional Election True?

Speaking of unconditional election, V/C gives an accurate definition: **“God selects those to be saved without any condition.”** The Calvinist would add that this speaks of the unmerited grace and favor of God given before time began. Now, I should note that at this point in their talk, they began to talk about Limited Atonement and essentially did not even address unconditional election. They quoted 1 Timothy 2:3 – 4, 2 Peter 3:9, John 12:32, and Hebrews 2:9 to try to refute Unconditional Election, but these verses have much more to do with Limited Atonement, so I will include those verses in the Limited Atonement section.

Unconditional Election means that before time began, God freely chose those He would save through Christ. We have already covered election and predestination, so I would just add that the only alternative to unconditional election is that God places a condition on election, that a man must *do something* to be regarded as one of the elect. First, as previously shown, that sense of the idea of election, predestination, and foreknowledge of God is foreign to Scripture. Second, Scripture is quite clear about the unconditional nature of election: Ephesians 2:8 states that “by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” As a reminder, V/C already acknowledged that **“faith will come into your heart, supernatural faith, and you have the ability to be saved”** (emphasis mine). It is supernatural faith because faith itself, along with grace, is the gift of God. This supernatural ability to have faith and to be saved is also described clearly in Titus 3:5: “He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.” Why did he save us? According to his own mercy – unconditional election.

Is Limited Atonement True?

Limited Atonement (Particular Redemption) says that Christ died only for the elect, while unlimited atonement says that Christ died for all and that there is only the *potential* payment for sin which will be extended to those who accept Him. Limited Atonement says that at the cross, Christ made *actual*, not just potential payment.

To support their disagreement with Limited Atonement, V/C quote many of the famous “all” and “world” passages of the Bible.

- The “all” passages they use which include the use of some form of $\pi\alpha\varsigma$ (*pas*) (“all” or “every”)
 - 1 Timothy 2:3–4 “This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”
 - 1 Timothy 2:5–6 “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.”
 - 2 Peter 3:9 “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”
 - John 12:32 “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”
 - Isaiah 53:6 “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – every one – to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”
 - Hebrews 2:9 “But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”

Pas ("all") *can* refer to every single individual in some contexts, but in other cases it is clearly *not* referring to every single individual. Therefore, "all" needs to be interpreted with care in light of the whole of Scripture. For example: Jesus said in Matthew 10:22 to His disciple that "you will be hated by *all* for my name's sake." We know that cannot mean every single human being. Paul said in Acts 26:4 that "my manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by *all* the Jews." This is speaking not of every Jew, but of those who knew Paul in Israel. Paul himself even explained in one situation that *pas* doesn't mean "all with no exceptions." In 1 Corinthians 15:27, quoting Psalm 8:6, he says that " 'God has put *all* things in subjection under his feet.' But when it says, 'all things are put in subjection,' it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him." Paul is rightly making sure the reader understands that "all" does not include God himself. In 1 Timothy 6:10, Paul says that "the love of money is a root of *all* kinds of evils." No one would say that *all* evil comes from the love of money (this is why ESV supplies the words "*kinds of*" evil).

They quote John 12:32: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." But this cannot mean that all men will be saved. In context, Jesus was speaking in answer to a group of Gentiles who had requested an audience with him. His point is that not only will *Jews* have the opportunity for salvation, but Gentiles as well – all people. They reference 1 Timothy 2:3–6: "This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time." But it cannot be that God has decreed that every single human will be saved. Jesus denied this: "And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness'" (Matthew 7:23).

- The “world” (κοσμος – *kosmos*) passages V/C use are as follows:
 - 1 John 2:2 “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”
 - John 3:16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

Like the word “all,” *kosmos* has a “world” of uses. In Romans 1:8 and Colossians 1:6, *kosmos* refers to the Roman empire. In Romans 11:12, the term refers to the Gentile world in contrast to Israel. In John 17:9, it refers to men other than Christ’s disciples. In 1 John 2:15, *kosmos* speaks of the evil system that opposes God and is hostile to Him.

Probably the most challenging puzzle is 1 John 2:2: “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.” But there are at least three possible reasons for this that does not restrict our interpretation to unlimited atonement:³⁹

1. Scope of Jesus’ propitiation – it is not limited to the apostles and those in direct contact with the apostles
2. Exclusiveness of Jesus’ propitiation – there is no other option for the whole world. (This would also fit well with 1 John 4:14: “And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.” Also John 4:42; John 3:16)
3. Perpetuity of Jesus’ propitiation – Jesus will always be the way, truth and life.

³⁹ Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1998), 697–98.

These three other options eliminate the possibility that John *must* be speaking of unlimited atonement, and using the principle of Scripture interpreting Scripture, 1 John 2:2 does not stand as the lone verse by which we succumb to unlimited atonement.

There are numerous passages which indicate that Christ died for *a particular* people.

- “She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save *his people* from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).
- “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a *ransom for many*” (Matthew 20:28).
- “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for *the sheep*” (John 10:11).
- See also: Matthew 26:28; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25 – 27; Romans 8:32 – 34; Hebrews 9:15; Hebrews 9:28; Revelation 5:9.

Two final cautions about unlimited atonement. First, it “strips the work of Christ on the cross of any actual atonement for anyone specifically, and it provides only a potential satisfaction for God’s wrath.”⁴⁰ And second, the denial of doctrine of Limited Atonement is often a stepping stone toward the belief in the non-judgment personal annihilation of the lost and the eternal life of the saved which in turn is a stepping stone toward Universalism, that all will be saved eventually.

⁴⁰ John MacArthur, *1-3 John*, MNTC (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007), 48–49.

Is Irresistible Grace True?

V/C give the following definition for Irresistible Grace (also known as the Efficacious Call or Effectual Call):⁴¹ **“God’s grace for salvation cannot be resisted.”** V/C make the point that the Bible shows that God’s grace for salvation *can*, in fact be resisted. They cite the following verses:

- Matthew 23:37 “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”
- John 5:39–40 “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.”
- Acts 7:51 “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.”

Let me say at the outset that none of these prove that grace is resistible; they rightly show that those whom God has not chosen are responsible and culpable – “you were not willing...you refuse to come to me...you always resist.”

Now, let’s get a little more specific about understanding Irresistible Grace. Calvinism makes a distinction between a general call (gospel invitation call) and a special inward call by the Spirit of God.⁴² The general outward call “invites all men without distinction to drink freely of the water of life and live.”⁴³ The unregenerate man will not respond to

⁴¹ David N. Steele, Curtis C. Thomas, and S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, and Documented*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Company, 2004), 52.

⁴² Steele, Thomas, and Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism*, 52–53.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 52.

the general call no matter what kind of promises or emotional coercion is employed. They will not bow to the Lord in submission and in repentance and will frankly resent you for asking them to do so. The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, issues a special call to the elect in addition to the general call. As V/C have already agreed, **“faith will come into your heart, supernatural faith, and you have the ability to be saved”** (emphasis mine). “This is accomplished through regeneration or the new birth by which the sinner is made a child of God and is given spiritual life.”⁴⁴

The general call of God can certainly be resisted, which the verses V/C quoted show. Calvinism has no argument with that. But V/C failed to make a distinction between the general and the specific call. The reason this is a critical error is that it opens the door to believing that you can manipulate people into the kingdom of God. If your preaching is relevant enough (which means lacking in biblical depth and clarity); if your programs are snazzy enough; if your community services are broad enough; if your music is loud enough; if your leaders are culturally sensitive and dress youthfully enough—then you can personally get people saved.

Scripture, however, indicates that it is the Spirit of God who leads the elect to salvation.

- In John 3:3–8, Jesus tells Nicodemus that unless “one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Jesus goes on to describe this rebirth as being “born of the Spirit.” The illustration Jesus uses of the Spirit of God is that He is like the wind. The wind blows whatever it wishes and no one know where it comes from or where it goes.
- “He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.” (Titus 3:5).

⁴⁴ Ibid., 53.

- This is the heart and soul of the New Covenant, prophesied by Jeremiah, and of which Gentiles have now been made partakers. “And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” (Ezekiel 36:26–27).
- “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,” (1 Peter 1:3).
- “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved –” (Ephesians 2:4–5).

The number of passages which indicate that the special internal call of God is irresistible are so numerous that I will simply refer the reader to page 54 and following of *The Five Points of Calvinism* by Steele, Thomas, and Quinn.

The crux of the issue is the connection between predestination and the call of God to salvation. *These are not the same thing.* One may be predestined, that is, of the elect, but God still must call one to salvation to actually receive the Spirit of God and be born again. The connection is really quite simple: every single person God has predestined *will* receive the irresistible call of God to salvation. “*And those whom he predestined he also called*, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified” (Romans 8:30). It is the glorious grace of God that makes the “unwilling heart

personally willing and awakens a deadened heart to be able to respond to God such that they know the gospel, desire salvation, and are willing to repent.”⁴⁵

There are two common arguments against Irresistible Grace which V/C bring up. The first is that Irresistible Grace is *unethical* and the second is that Irresistible Grace is *unfair*. First, the argument of the unethical nature of Irresistible Grace is set up with a classic illustration (illustrations, by the way, do not prove or disprove scriptural truth). Irresistible Grace **“Means that those who are chosen have no decision. You have no choice.”** –Mr. Vietti characterized this like putting a gun to his wife’s head and saying **“You will be my wife...or you get a bullet in your head.”** He then goes on to say this makes him a robot. We have already established that the decision one makes to come to faith in Christ, while empowered by the Spirit of God, is a real decision with the real consequence of salvation and eternal life. Characterizing Irresistible Grace as unethical flies in the face of John 3:16. *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”* God *did* say that whoever believes in him will NOT perish. It is absurd to characterize this as unethical.

Those whom God is about to judge, *even when they know it is God doing so*, refuse to come to Him! In Revelation 6, in John’s description of the sixth seal judgment of the Day of the Lord, when the earth will be undergoing great cataclysmic judgments of God: *“Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb”* (Revelation 6:15–16). They *know* this is God – the Lamb of God – who is raining down judgment on the earth, so how do they respond? Three times in Revelation: *“Nor did they repent of their*

⁴⁵ Michael Vlach, Theology III Syllabus, The Master’s Seminary, Fall 2011.

murders or sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts” (9:21); “They did not repent and give him glory” (16:9); “[They] cursed the God of heaven . . . they did not repent of their deeds” (16:11). The point is that the elect never have to have a gun pointed at their head; they may try to resist for a time, but ultimately their own God-given, Spirit-led desire leads them to run into the arms of the Savior. In real life, I would defy V/C to find a single true believer in Christ who feels he has been brought into the kingdom of God at gunpoint.

The second argument V/C bring up is that Irresistible Grace is *unfair*. V/C sets up a situation in which a person *wants* to come to faith in God but is not chosen, so they feel hopeless. They accuse Calvinism as teaching to distraught teenagers, “**‘I can’t even turn to God because He hasn’t chosen me; He doesn’t love me.’ I think [this] potentially has the power to add to a lot of suicidal situations.**” This is simply not possible. The ones who are not chosen do not desire to come to God. Here is undeniable proof:

- As Paul says in Romans, “As it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God” (Romans 3:10–11). To put it another way, *there is no such thing as a person who genuinely desires to come to faith in Christ but will be rejected by God.* Why? Because the effectual call of the Spirit of God is irresistible.
- In Peter’s great sermon at Pentecost he made a promise by quoting the prophet Joel, “ ‘And it shall come to pass that *everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved*’ ” (Acts 2:21). Paul quotes Joel as well: Romans 10:13 “For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ ”
- Jesus gave his great warm invitation in Matthew 11:28–29: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” Who are “all who labor and are heavy laden?” It is those who know that their sin has separated them from God.

As a final note, if God's special grace to save is resistible, then logically there would be the possibility that no one would be saved and that heaven would be empty. In fact, I believe that if God's special grace was resistible, heaven *would be empty* since Paul speaks in Romans 3 of all humanity as those with whom "there is no fear of God before their eyes."

Is Perseverance of the Saints True?

V/C states, **“We tend to probably agree with that more than we don’t and so that’s why we didn’t mention it.”** This is the issue of whether or not a true Christian can ever leave the faith, or is the work of God so effective that true believers will stay true and stay saved?

- “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:28).
- “For the LORD loves justice; he will not forsake his saints. They are preserved forever, but the children of the wicked shall be cut off” (Psalm 37:28).
- Jesus taught that those who believe in Him have immediate eternal life (John 3:15-16, 36; 4:14; 5:24; 6:40, 47).
- “And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:11-13).

I am not, however, necessarily going to celebrate this point of supposed agreement. If one does not hold to total depravity or to unconditional election, then the logical conclusion is that a person can be saved relatively easily on his own terms and by his own pre-faith decision to come to Christ. The combination of not holding to the first four points yet agreeing with the last one is often associated with a downplaying of the biblical view of repentance—turning away from sin—and is also associated with non-Lordship salvation: It is the view that says “God loves me and I’m fine now.” It carries an emphasis on just being happy and doing anything you want since you are under grace now. An emphasis on “God is Love” without balancing that with “God is just” can lead people to the false impression they have been saved because they now believe that God is love. But perseverance, while empowered by God, is proven and shown to be true by the changed

and changing conduct of true believers – and we are called to an aggressive perseverance both to test the false faith of a false believer and to confirm the true faith of a true believer.

- “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).
- “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12–13).
- “Bear fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matthew 3:8).
- “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7).

We know it is possible for a given local assembly to be filled with almost all unbelievers. This was the condemnation Jesus gave the church at Sardis. It was an exciting church outwardly, but Jesus saw the true condition: Revelation 3:1 says “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: ‘The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. “ ‘I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.’” But there were a few true believers there yet: Revelation 3:4 “Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy.” What was happening in Sardis? They were filling the church with people convinced they were saved but for the most part were not. This is not encouraging – this is often indicative that true gospel preaching, the gospel which is a stone of stumbling for most, is not happening. When Jesus preached the gospel in the strongest possible terms, his huge crowds disbursed (John 6:66)

Agreement with the final point does not impress or give me relief: it is a symptom of easy-believism, far in contrast to Jesus’ standard: Mark 8:34 “And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’”

Does Calvinism “Stifle Evangelism?”

Here is what V/C says about Calvinists: **“They are not going to evangelize.”** They characterize Calvinism as espousing: [Concerning the unsaved]--**“They have not been chosen, they can’t do anything about it. They can’t change it. It’s done. So some of your loved ones, they have not been chosen. And they can’t change that. They can cry out to God all they want but they have not been chosen. They have been created to be burned in hell for ever and ever and ever.”**

Here is how they characterize how Calvinists treat their neighbors:

- **“I don’t know how you can espouse this doctrine and look at your neighbor and go, ‘I’m going to heaven; I’m chosen, too bad for you.’”**
- **“And can you feel our hurt when you look at your next door neighbor, some of the nicest people in the world but they don’t want Jesus, they are so nice, and you look at their faces and say God has not chosen you and can’t do a thing about it. And He made you to scream and yell in pain for ever and ever and ever and He is glorified in that.”**
 - By the way, notice again that they characterize the unbeliever as one **“of the nicest people in the world.”**
- **“It stifles evangelism...Why would you evangelize? The one’s God chose they can’t resist grace so they are going to heaven.”**
- Mr. Vietti: **“I refuse to come to a place where I say, ‘I’m chosen, but the rest of the world, go to hell. I don’t care.’ ”**

This is an absurd accusation. Certainly there are plenty of people who call themselves Calvinists who don’t evangelize, but this doesn’t disprove the doctrines of Grace espoused by Calvin, it just proves they are disobedient believers. The preaching of the gospel is God’s chosen means to awaken faith in the elect (Acts 13:48). We preach the Word and proclaim the gospel because this is our Savior’s command. We preach with

the greatest persuasiveness we can muster yet fully knowing that God must awaken the deadened spirit of man. John Calvin himself said, “Let preaching, then, take its course that it may lead men to faith.”⁴⁶

18th century preacher George Whitefield, a staunch Calvinist and arguably the most prolific and greatest evangelist since the Apostle Paul, preached gospel messages on average 1000 times per year for 34 years. On one occasion, he was giving advice to Howell Harris during the Welsh Revival. Whitefield encouraged him to preach “God’s free, electing grace to his listeners, especially the unconverted.”⁴⁷

Put them in mind of the freeness and eternity of God’s electing love, and be instant with them to lay hold of the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ by faith. Talk to them, oh talk to them till midnight, of the riches of His all-sufficient grace. Tell them, oh tell them, what He has done for their souls, and how earnestly He is now interceding for them in heaven . . . Press on them to believe immediately! Intersperse prayers with your exhortations, and thereby call down fire from heaven, even the fire of the Holy Ghost . . . Speak every time, my dear brother, as if it were your last. Weep out, if possible, every argument, and as it were, compel them to say, ‘behold how He loveth us!’⁴⁸

Quite the contrary, Calvinism *promotes* evangelism because we know with certainty that as we proclaim the gospel, the elect *will* respond and for this we rejoice! Christ said He *would* build His church and evangelism is the means by which this will be accomplished.

⁴⁶ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.23.13.

⁴⁷ Steven J. Lawson, *The Evangelistic Zeal of George Whitefield* (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2013), 51.

⁴⁸ Quoted and cited in Lawson, *The Evangelistic Zeal of George Whitefield*, 51–52.

Do Calvinists Believe God is the Author of Sin?

Perhaps the most serious error concerning historical Calvinism that was made by V/C was their characterization that Calvinists believe that God is the author of sin. After using an illustration that the sinful world is like a house on fire and that Jesus is rescuing some but in his sovereignty he will leave some in there to burn. They state the following:

But here's this crazy thing about this doctrine of sovereignty and predestination that they espouse. Is that in the logical educated intelligent view of this doctrine not only do you have to say that God chooses to rescue some and rescue others but ultimately if God is the one who created everything including every bit of sin that we see, God is ultimately the author of everything then not only is God the one rescuing the people from fire but he's the arsonist that set the fire to begin with.

This is nothing short of accusing the Calvinist of believing that God is evil. What did John Calvin believe? Chapter 18 of Book 1 of Calvin's Institutes is titled "The Instrumentality of the Wicked Employed by God, While He Continues Free from Every Taint" – that while God is completely sovereign, he never touches evil.

There is no doubt that the issue of theodicy – trying to reconcile God's perfect goodness, God's perfect power, and the undeniable presence of evil – is a high and lofty theological issue to ponder. The question is basically, "If God is perfectly good and perfectly powerful, then why is there evil in the world?" And conversely, "If there is evil in the world, then does this call into question God's goodness or His ability to thwart evil?"

This accusation that Calvinists believe that God is evil must be answered in detail. I would like to present 10 truths concerning this issue that I believe represent an orthodox understanding.⁴⁹

Truth 1: God is Good. First, God is separate from all that is evil.⁵⁰ Habakkuk 1:13a states, “Your eyes are too pure to approve evil.” The rest of the verse contains Habakkuk’s own questions about God and evil, why God seems silent in the face of evil, but Habakkuk asserts his *theology* before his *theodicy*. Second, God’s goodness is not measured by suffering or circumstances.⁵¹ Psalm 119:68 states, “You are good and do good.” The Psalmist, even while afflicted, expresses confidence in God’s goodness.⁵² God does good things *because* He is good; it is His core nature.⁵³ In Job 34:10, Elihu states, “Far be it from God to do wickedness.” God lacks evil of any kind.⁵⁴

Truth 2: God is Glorified by His Use of Evil. God is glorified in the display of His wrath *against* evil. Psalm 76:10 states that “the wrath of man shall praise You.” This pictures the powers of mankind rebelling against God, and ultimately in their defeat being forced to acknowledge and glorify God.⁵⁵ God’s wrath will also bring Him praise from His own

⁴⁹ The following is taken nearly verbatim from my own unpublished paper on the topic, “A Pastoral Response to the Problem of Evil: Shepherding the Suffering Toward the Gospel,” Fall 2010, The Master’s Seminary, © 2010 Steve Swartz.

⁵⁰ Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, Vol. 1 (Detroit: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008), 247, 249.

⁵¹ J. Carl Laney, Jr., “God: Who He Is, What He Does, How to Know Him Better,” In *Understanding Systematic Theology*, ed. Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 187.

⁵² Steven J. Lawson, *Psalms 76-150*,. HOTC (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2006), 248.

⁵³ John Goldingay, *Psalms 90-150*, BECOT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 407-8.

⁵⁴ John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 452–3.

⁵⁵ John Goldingay, *Psalms 42-89*, BECOT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 455.

people.⁵⁶ Romans 9:22 refers to those who reject the gospel as “vessels of wrath prepared for destruction” that are to “demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known.” Proverbs 16:4 says, “The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil.” Recompense glorifies God, so evil exists for this type of glory to come to God.⁵⁷

Truth 3: God Does Not Do Evil, But He Ordained That it Exist. Scripture demonstrates this seeming paradox:

- “Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, Unless the Lord has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High That both good and ill go forth?” (Lam 3:37-38)
- “The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these” (Is 45:7).

Evil is best described as the absence of good. Since God created all things, and all things He created are very good (Gen 1:31), God cannot have created evil.⁵⁸ Concerning Isaiah 45:7, Oswalt says that everything that exists, “whether positive or negative from our perspective, does so because of the creative will of God.”⁵⁹ Evil exists by God’s permission *and through* the foreordained choice of those whom He created.⁶⁰ The

⁵⁶ Lawson, *Psalms 76-150*, 6.

⁵⁷ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, Leicester, Great Britain: Intervarsity Press, 1994), 327.

⁵⁸ Robert A. Pyne, “Humanity and Sin: The Creation, Fall and Redemption of Humanity,” in *Understanding Systematic Theology*, ed. Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 724.

⁵⁹ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 204.

⁶⁰ John MacArthur, “Is God Responsible for Evil?” *Grace To You*, http://www.gty.org/Resources/Articles/A189_Is-God-Responsible-for-Evil?q=evil (accessed October 15, 2010), 1; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 328; Robert D. Culver, “The Nature and Origin of Evil,” *BSAC* (April 1972), 109.

alternative is that a different power is the cause, making God no longer sovereign.⁶¹ Evil is not a glitch in God's plan, but an integral piece.⁶² If this is not true, His omnipotence is nullified.⁶³ In Luke 22:22, Jesus states, "For indeed, the Son of Man is going **as it has been determined**; but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!" Jesus' betrayal is God's plan, yet the *betrayor* is responsible. In the Lamentations 3 passage, God is achieving His purposes and is using what from a human perspective are good and bad things to do so, but the achievement of His will is always good. This is "a divine decree which uses and overrules the wicked acts of mankind to achieve God's purpose."⁶⁴ "The Bible makes no bones about assigning the existence of evil to the permission of God's government---providence,"⁶⁵ but God's holiness is never compromised.⁶⁶ When God commanded Adam to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17), this showed Adam's theoretical knowledge of evil, but not yet an experiential knowledge. In contrast, God only knows evil observationally.⁶⁷ In Isaiah 45:7, the use of "calamity" (NASB) or "evil" (AV) does not mean that God "cause[d] people to make morally evil decisions." It is best understood as the opposite of "well-being" in the verse, that is, painful situations in life *from our limited perspective*.⁶⁸ From a human perspective, suffering feels bad, but from God's perspective, it may be used to lovingly discipline the believer toward Christ-

⁶¹ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 204.

⁶² MacArthur, "Is God Responsible for Evil?", 2.

⁶³ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 328–9 .

⁶⁴ John L. Mackey, *Lamentations*, Mentor (Geanies House, Fearn, Tain, Ross-Shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2008), 153.

⁶⁵ Culver, "The Nature and Origin of Evil," 107.

⁶⁶ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 328.

⁶⁷ Pyne, "Humanity and Sin," 724.

⁶⁸ Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 204.

likeness, to draw the unbeliever toward salvation in Christ, or for reasons that we cannot discern.⁶⁹

God's ordaining of evil proves Him to be the only God. The context of Isaiah 45:7 proves this. In verse 5, God states, "I am the LORD, and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God." So, when bad things happen, this is not "because some evil god has thwarted the good intentions of a kindly but ineffectual grand-father god."⁷⁰ The bad circumstances are *solely* in relation to the one and only God.⁷¹ Similarly, in Lamentations 3, the "bad and good" is a phrase used by God to express that all things come from Him; there is no cause outside His control.⁷²

Truth 4: The Created, Not the Creator is Culpable for Evil Actions. Isaiah 66:3-4 describes people who willfully choose to disobey God. As a result God says, "I will choose their punishments. . . [they] chose that in which I did not delight." God placed before His people the choice (within His divine limits) to choose His ways or their own. Their choice of evil made them completely culpable.⁷³ Ecclesiastes 7:29 states, "Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices." Evil actions are not the product of ignorance, but devious schemes,⁷⁴ and God is completely just in His punishment of the evil-doer.⁷⁵

Truth 5: God's Relationship to Evil Has Not Been Fully Disclosed. Scripture reveals all that God wants revealed about His relationship to evil, but the Bible stops short of revealing

⁶⁹ Ibid., 205.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Mackay, *Lamentations*, 153.

⁷³ Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 668-9.

⁷⁴ Duane A. Garrett, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993), 325.

⁷⁵ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 329.

exactly how God ordains evil, yet remains separate from it.⁷⁶ Just because I cannot piece together a tightly-knit paradigm does not mean that the revealed truths about God and evil are not believable. There is an undeniable tension. Evil exists and it hurts; God is good and His nature remains constant. One does not eradicate the other. I cannot be at peace with evil, but as a Christian, I am at peace with *God*, trusting in His nature.⁷⁷ There is a complete answer to the problem of evil, one that would surely amaze us with the depth of the wisdom of God (Rom 11:33). “The problem of evil is beyond our capacity to exhaustively understand because God is beyond our ability to exhaustively understand.”⁷⁸

Truth 6: Absolute Freedom Cannot Exist. The logical conclusion of actual absolute freedom is freedom *completely devoid of God’s influence*. Even free will proponents who claim Jesus as Savior do not value total choice in practice. They look to Scripture, to prayer, and to the Holy Spirit to lead them. The Bible never says that humans are free “in the sense of being outside of God’s control.”⁷⁹ If we were capable of making completely free choices, we would be equal to God in this ability. We are as free as any creation can be: we make conscious, real choices that have actual consequences.⁸⁰ One Scripture devastates the idea of absolute freedom: “And He [Jesus]. . .upholds all things by the word of His power” (Heb 1:3). The world is “providentially sustained and directed by God Himself.”⁸¹ Jesus Christ is “sustaining the . . . galaxies as well as the . . . atoms.”⁸² Proverbs 21:1 says, “The

⁷⁶ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 330; Culver, “The Nature and Origin of Evil?”, 108.

⁷⁷ Pyne, “Humanity and Sin,” 760-2.

⁷⁸ Helseth, “On Divine Ambivalence,” 511.

⁷⁹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 331.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Kent R. Hughes, *Hebrews*, PTW (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993), 31.

king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes." God asserts His sovereignty even in the privacy of human thought.⁸³

Truth 7: Sin and Death Entered at a Certain Point in Time. This gets closer to the heart of the answer to the problem of evil: the gospel. Romans 5:12 states that "Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin." Every human has been poisoned by sin.⁸⁴ We are, in essence, Adam himself.⁸⁵ The bent toward evil and the inevitability of death haunts humanity. Though Adam is responsible for the entrance of sin, humans are still responsible for their own sin and have only one recourse: to submit to the work of Jesus in salvation to pay the price for sin.⁸⁶

Truth 8: God Vanquishes Evil and Eradicates the Effects of Sin. Scripture gives comfort to the suffering Christian, and points the suffering unbeliever to the gospel. Presently, Christ has delivered the Christian from the penalty of sin (Romans 8:1-2), and the Spirit of God counters our tendency toward evil (Romans 8:13-14). In the future, there will be no more sin and evil (Rev 21:4; 22:3) and death is defeated (1 Cor 15:26). The cross put to death human sin and the resurrection guaranteed future invulnerability to sin.⁸⁷ Any suffering the Christian undergoes will be overshadowed by the glory to come (Rom 8:18).

⁸³ Raymond C. Leeuwen, *Proverbs*, Vol. 5 of The New Interpreter's Bible (Nashville:Abingdon Press, 1994), 192.

⁸⁴ Everett F. Harrison, *Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians*, EBC (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 1976), 61–2.

⁸⁵ Kent R. Hughes, *Romans*, PTW (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), 114.

⁸⁶ Pyne, "Humanity and Sin," 737–8, 748, 760.

⁸⁷ Ron Highfield, "The Problem with the 'Problem of Evil': A Response to Gregory Boyd's Open Theist Solution," *Restoration Quarterly* 45, no 3 (2003), 176.

Truth 9: Satan's Role in Suffering is Completely Under God's Dominion. Satan has been given a measure of temporary rule in the earth (John 12:31; 2 Cor 4:4, Luke 4:5-7), but Satan's actions on earth exist within God's defined limits.⁸⁸ Daniel 2:20-21 states that all power belongs to God. The events, times, seasons, and rulers of history are determined proactively by God.⁸⁹ When Satan suggests God torment Job to show that Job only serves God selfishly, God *uses* Satan himself as His tool to prove Satan wrong. God gives Satan permission to afflict Job (Job 1:12), but places strict limits upon on Satan.⁹⁰ Job's response is to ascribe responsibility for his calamity to God *and* to worship and bless God (Job 1:20-21). Satan was not Job's focus,⁹¹ and Job acknowledged God's absolute rights over all that was his.⁹² Second Samuel 24:1 recounts the Lord moving David to take a census, but the parallel passage in First Chronicles 21:1 says that "Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel." Sin in Israel had "been brought. . .to a stage where judgment was necessary."⁹³ These two texts present the same truth from different vantage points: God directed, Satan tempted, and David sinned.⁹⁴

Truth 10: God Uses Evil to Bring Good to the Christian. Jesus suffered willingly "for the joy set before Him" (Heb 12:1-3), fully knowing that there would be a happy ending, though

⁸⁸ John Piper, "Ten Aspects of God's Sovereignty in Suffering and Satan's Hand in It," in *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*, ed. John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006), 19.

⁸⁹ Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *Daniel Minor Prophets*, EBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), 43.

⁹⁰ John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 74.

⁹¹ Piper, "Ten Aspects," 23.

⁹² Hartley, *Job*, 77-78.

⁹³ Culver, "The Nature and Origin of Evil," 108.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*; John Mark Hicks, *1 & 2 Chronicles*, College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 2001), 200.

He would first suffer death.⁹⁵ Though Jesus knew the entire story, the gospels reveal the emotion of His suffering. For the mere mortal sufferer, God's purposes are not immediately apparent, but the sufferer can trust that God has a purpose that is good.⁹⁶ The cornerstone verse for suffering Christians has been Romans 8:28: "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Several key elements give comfort to the suffering: First, the context of Romans 8:28 is the end-times high point for which God has planned all things. It is the Christian looking ahead to the time when God will bring all things into perfect order, and when reasons will be known and understood. The working together of all things suggests a target point, a contribution toward a final goal. Second, there is immediate good. Verse 29 speaks of the destiny of each believer to be conformed to Christ-likeness and that "all things" work toward this end.⁹⁷ Suffering acts as a purifying agent to increase holiness (Heb 12:10) and increase faith in God (2 Cor 12:9-10).⁹⁸ Many other good things come to the Christian from suffering: a deepened understanding of Christ's sacrifice (Col 1:24),⁹⁹ a preparation for the future revealing of the glory of God,¹⁰⁰ and increased prayer and knowledge of God.¹⁰¹ Third, it reminds the Christian to view suffering with an eternal outlook. There is not always a happy ending in this life, but suffering is not ultimately destructive to the Christian.¹⁰² Second

⁹⁵ Pyne, "Humanity and Sin," 759.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Hughes, *Romans*, 167.

⁹⁸ John Piper, "Why God Appoints Suffering for His Servants," in *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*, ed. John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006), 92.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 98.

¹⁰⁰ Hughes, *Romans*, 168.

¹⁰¹ D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *The Final Perseverance of the Saints (8:17-39)*, Vol. 8 of *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 167.

¹⁰² Hughes, *Romans*, 167.

Corinthians 4:17 reminds the Christian that suffering is actually “producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.”¹⁰³ Finally, Romans 8:28 leads the suffering once again to the gospel. The gospel must be the focus of the suffering, because the promised happy ending only happens for the saved.¹⁰⁴ The Christian looks to the gospel for joy, and the unbeliever looks to gospel to solve evil in his own heart.

¹⁰³ Piper, “Why God Appoints Suffering,” 93.

¹⁰⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *The Final Perseverance*, 160.

Is the Message Given by Mr. Vietti and Mr. Crews Consistent with the Biblical Gospel?

I maintain that the October 1, 2014, message given by Mr. Vietti and Mr. Crews was not just a critique of Calvinism, but an attack on the biblical gospel. I present several disturbing evidences of this:

- Mr. Vietti stated, **“If I looked at my kid and thought that he wasn’t chosen and was going to hell you know what I would do? I’d say if it’s OK with you, I’m going to hell with my kid. How many of you parents would say that, I’ll go with them.”** So he directly stated that he would rather go to hell than be separated from his children. But Jesus said, in Luke 14:26, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” By Jesus’ standards, one who would rather be with his children than come to faith in Christ “cannot be my disciple.”
- Mr. Vietti stated the following. **“What if at the end of the day God says, ‘You’re not in.’ – ‘But why? I was good, I recognized Jesus?’ – ‘But I just didn’t choose you.’** Please note that the standard he gave that one should present to God is that **“I was good; I recognized Jesus.”** (It is certainly possible that in the moment of public speaking, this was a slip of the tongue on the part of Mr. Vietti, but if so he should correct it publically.). First of all, Romans 3:12 says that no one does good. Mr. Vietti’s statement is nothing short of espousing works-based salvation. Second, the stand of “I recognized Jesus” is not the gospel. James 2:19 says that “even the demons believe.” And certainly the gospel accounts of Jesus interactions with demons show us that they clearly “recognize Jesus.”

- This is precisely the type of person Jesus warned us *not* to be: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ [**“I recognized Jesus”**] will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ [**“I was good.”**] And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’” (Matthew 7:21–23).
- As mentioned earlier, they characterize the unbeliever as **“some of the nicest people in the world but they don’t want Jesus.”**
- Speaking of the gospel: **“What’s the good news about that message they have? None.”** So, when we call people to faith in Christ, when we preach and proclaim in detail the doctrines of grace such as regeneration, calling, sanctification, grace, the work of the Father, Son and Spirit in salvation as shown in Ephesians 1 – when we proclaim that “nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39) – when we go house to house as we do in our church asking people to come to faith in Christ because God loves them and sent His Son for their sins and when we demonstrate the love of Christ to others by means of the great love we have for one another – when we see lives being radically changed by the gospel and people weeping and laughing and singing in the excellent joy of the Lord, *that means:* **“What’s the good news about that message they have? None.”?**

At the beginning of V/C’ message, they state [the] **“war is not against them personally** [meaning churches in Bakersfield]. I will agree with that – you have picked a fight with the gospel of Christ and that is a fight you cannot ultimately win.

Conclusion

Mr. Vietti and Mr. Crews challenged their congregation to **“ask other Christians, ‘Do you believe in divine election the way John Calvin believed in it?’”** Richard D. Phillips says this: “Whenever I am asked, ‘Do you, a Calvinist, really believe in predestination?’ I always answer in two ways. First, I say, ‘Being a Calvinist means a lot more than believing in election.’ But then I hasten to add, ‘But I most certainly do believe the wonderful doctrine of predestination, and I praise the Lord for the legacy of John Calvin in promoting this most God-glorifying and soul-elevating truth.”

“Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.” (James 3:1)

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15)

APPENDIX

Transcript of “A Conversation about Calvinism” Ron Vietti and Jim Crews, October 1, 2014

After this conversation was given at Valley Bible Fellowship Church in Bakersfield, California, it was posted as a video on their website under the title “Calvinism Exposed” with a picture of cute babies next to it. They removed it from the website days later, but it had already been posted to YouTube. The YouTube link has now also been removed as of the writing. Thankfully, we were able to create a transcript of the message. This was done with the utmost care and integrity to accurately represent word-for-word what was said. When we are not sure what was said, the transcript indicates this.

(Jim) I think it’s time that we address it. It’s something we don’t typically spend time on so it’s a little different for us to be able to do this. So I encourage you to do as you’re listening to this message is grab a notepad, take some notes, and be ready to respond to things we challenge you on video so you can do your own homework and look at this for yourselves. But I just want to ask Pastor Ron before we get into the video, this isn’t typical for us. We don’t typically don’t spend a service dealing with a doctrine like we did. How did you feel about having to do this?

(Pastor Ron) You know I don’t like doing this, obviously. But I know it’s a duty of a shepherd. If a wolf comes into the flock or there’s a bad doctrine, I know it is our calling to address these things. I like to be positive. I like to laugh. I don’t like to be negative. But when there’s a doctrine like this that comes along and has the potential of really, really hurting a lot of people we have to take time out and do this. I hope you see the spirit of what we’re doing this in tonight. I hope it’s a good spirit. It’s because we care about you. It has to be done.

(Jim) Alright, so without further ado, watch the message.

(Pastor Ron) Before I pray, I feel like the apostle Paul tonight in the fact that there is bad doctrine going around the church. People were accusing the apostle Paul and saying you know you are not really an apostle and on and on. And he said, “You know I hate to do what I’m doing, but I have to boast a little bit. He said boasting is not even good but you are forcing me to do it. And he went on to talk about all the signs of God in his life and how God was doing all this stuff. Charlie Garcia, when I tell you, this guy, I’ll tell you this one thing and then I’m going to come

back Sunday. I don't know if you've heard this Peter. But John Tweed shared it. That one day in Charlie's neighborhood they put up a stop sign. Now for those of you that don't know Charlie Garcia, the way I phrase Him is this: Charlie Garcia was the most godly man I ever knew and he is the most godly man I will ever know. Because he set the bar so high I don't think any human being can get any higher. And you hear some people "Amening" me. And he said they put a stop sign up in his neighborhood and it was a corner where there was never any stop sign before. And everybody just blew through it. One day he blew through it and he got so convicted by God that he stopped and backed his car all the way up and then went up to it again and said, "God I'm doing this because that's the law and you're pleased when I keep the law." He went on, stopped and backed his car up again and stopped and said, "This second time is totally for you." And he said from that day forward God said, "With that kind of obedience I can trust you and I'll start blessing you." And it went on from there.

(Ron) Jim and I are going to address a doctrine tonight and I'm not happy I'm having to do this, but I have to do it. There's a doctrine that many churches in Bakersfield believe in, a lot of young pastors believe in. And this doctrine is the ugliest doctrine I've ever seen in my life. Now before you get down on us and say, "I don't want to hear negativism," we've been called to stand up against heresy. We are commanded to do that as shepherds. I'm going to show you something, hold on to your seat. I want to show you a picture of some cute babies, everyone likes cute babies. Take a look at some of these pictures if you will. Aww, wow, quadruplets. Don't you love babies. The doctrine we are going to share with you tonight. The doctrine says we are created by God with the intentions that we are going to burn in hell. And He will be glorified when they are burned in hell. Wrong! This doctrine is called Calvinism and me and Jim are going to address it tonight. I want to start out by saying one thing. There are a lot of Calvinist churches in Bakersfield. I'm not going to name them, but war is not against them personally. It is against a doctrine that is horrible. Their doctrine states basically (it's a dirty little secret they don't want anyone to know) but because the Bible says that the road is broad that leads to destruction, and the road to life is narrow and few find it. We know the Bible teaches that compared to the percentage of people on the earth, very few are going to be saved. But their doctrine states, I know the doctrine, states that God only chooses a few. He only chooses some to have eternal life. His decision is only based on whatever. We don't know what it is based on. He chooses some to be saved, He chooses others to be born with the intention that they will suffer in hell forever and ever and God is glorified in that suffering.

A horrible, horrible doctrine. I want to tell you something tonight. God loves everyone. Listen to me. God is not the kind of God that says eenie meenie miney moe, I'll pick you, you, you. The rest of you I created with the intention of you burning in hell and I'll be glorified as you burn. That is the doctrine, is that not the doctrine? (turns to Jim)

(Jim) Yes this has become a hot button for Pastor Ron and I both. In the church world we have to deal with critics from other pastors and ministries and I was sharing this with Ron the other day. I kind of feel like we are just that kid in the playground. That kid that is just happy to be there and we're having fun and this bully comes over and just kind of shoves us. Knock it off, I'm just playing. You should play too, you should have fun. We're just on the playground. And you play a little bit longer and he comes over and pushes you again. "Alright, I'm going tell you that if you do this again, it's on like Donkey Kong, alright? Al right, you got this? I feel like we're that kid on the playground that keeps keeping pushed around with this doctrine that has become very popular by guys like John Piper, with organizations like Acts 29, the Gospel Coalition, and this resurgent reformation movement. And I feel that we're that school kid that keeps getting pushed around and we just want to speak on the love of God. We feel like that is the prominent message of the Bible and we want to specifically teach on that but these guys keep jabbing us around so that it's just gaining popularity and it needs to spoke against. Because in my mind and I may stand a little more on this side than Pastor Ron does that in my mind this doctrine is blasphemous, it's unbiblical, it's heresy. And I believe it is a doctrine of demons.

(Pastor Ron) It has marred the image of my father. I told Jim on the way out, "It's like someone is blaspheming my father. And they are knocking Him and saying He is cruel, and He's like a heathen god. I'm angry, that's my dad. Let me tell you something. God, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. Listen God loves all you. You homosexuals, God loves you. You gangsters, God loves you. You strippers, God loves you. I hate to say it but you Calvinists, God loves you too. He loves everybody, He love you and you and you. You see, I refuse to come to a place where I say, "I'm chosen, but the rest of the world, go to hell. I don't care." I just got a message from Rod Jones, he comes here to speak. He says, "Ron, I support what you're doing tonight. I was just meeting with 20 pastors awhile back and we were talking about evangelism and the one guy from a certain denomination said, 'My church says evangelism is a waste of time

because God already knows who is going to be saved and who isn't. so we don't evangelize.'" Do you understand with this doctrine that God has already chosen, he's already chosen who has going to be saved and it's a minority. So probably I can't put a percentage on it but the largest percentage of Bakersfield they don't have any decision about this. They have not been chosen, they can't do anything about it. They can't change it. It's done. So some of your loved ones, they have not been chosen. And they can't change that. They can cry out to God all they want but they have not been chosen. They have been created to be burned in hell for ever and ever and ever. Now again, we're not talking about a small road? There are dozens of churches in Bakersfield that teach this. They keep it quiet, I could name some and you'd go "whoos." Now listen, I know, I told Jim before I came out here. I know what I'm doing talking about this tonight. If you can't kill the message, kill the messenger. I know I'm setting myself up. You're going to see it on the Internet. This guy tried to come against me personally with everything they have. They are the minority of the church, but they are gaining momentum. And there are dozens of churches in Bakersfield, but the first thing they are going to do is kill the messenger. I know I'm setting myself up for that. But I love people so much that I don't care. If I get killed, I get killed. And the second thing they are going to do, they are going to say we don't understand the message. We do understand it totally. So I know that's going to happen. Here's what you do. If you have people trying to get you to go to another church or are just visiting another church, ask them one thing and they'll have to answer this. "Do you believe in divine election the way John Calvin believed it?" Now I'll say that again. Ask other Christians, "Do you believe in divine election the way John Calvin believed in it?" It's a yes or no question. But they won't answer with a yes. They'll say what we mean is. After they say that, the conversation is over. Now again, I hate to think of my father that way. That he has created the majority of people to burn in hell, am I not right, to burn in hell and He's glorified in that. They have no choice. I said this to Jim and I'll turn it to him. You don't know if your kids are chosen. It's unconditional grace, you don't know. If I looked at my kid and thought that he wasn't chosen and was going to hell you know what I would do? I'd say if it's OK with you, I'm going to hell with my kid. How many of you parents would say that, I'll go with them. If they have no choice, I have no choice. And that's the heart of Moses, in the Old Testament said, if you take their name out of the book of life, take mine out too. I'll tell you right now, if they were right about that God, if they were right, which I know they are not, but if they were right, that God creates people to suffer in hell and gives them no choice about it, I will choose to go to hell with those

other people. I will choose to go. If they have no choice, why should I have a choice? But I know that is not my father. I know it's not. Jim take off...

(Jim) I was going to add to that and you mentioned that from the get go is that their interpretation of God in that light is not only that he is going to choose who goes there to heaven and to hell but He is glorified in that. I want to reemphasize that because the one thing that we do know and that the Bible makes very crystal clear on is that God is love . He is the essence of love, He is the character of love and I John spells that out for us. Everything we view of God has to stems from that idea, that He is love. In fact, on Sunday and I believe I touched on it last Wednesday when Pastor Ron was in Vegas is what we know to be true about God is found in Jesus Christ. In Hebrews chapter 1 we covered that last week so what I have a difficult time with is this view of God that is being distorted and we're going to get to that in one of the points in a moment. But what you have to do as one who believes in God and studies the Bible, is that the invisible God has made himself visible through His son, Jesus Christ. Everything that is consistent with Jesus Christ in doctrine is true. Everything that is inconsistent with Jesus Christ in doctrine, is false teaching. And so you have to view Jesus Christ and the view of love in order to accept or reject any kind of idea of God that somebody gives you through commentary or even a teaching.

(Pastor Ron) Tell them about the house on fire analogy.

(Jim) I was telling Ron that the doctrine of Calvinism highlights the sovereignty of God, which Ron and I both dispel(?) the sovereignty of God as well, that ultimately God is all powerful and that God is going to have his say so in whatever he wants, he gets. The crazy thing about God as you read the Bible is that He has created humanity with the freedom to choose. Now it is not my place to ask God why he did that. That's just the set up that He gave us because often times when I'm choosing the wrong things, "God why did you give me the ability to choose because I don't do right a lot of times." So it would have made life a lot easier, but in God's sovereignty that's how he set it up. So if he said, OK, I'm going to set it up for you to have free will, you're going to be able to choose, this idea where you're going to be making choices but I have purpose and predestined you not to be chosen and I've created you so that you're going to go to hell, but I'm going to choose to rescue some. It's the picture of a firefighter. Who, you see a house on fire, and some Calvinist will even you an illustration of a house burning and going in to rescue them. But the idea is God is this one who has sent Jesus on this rescue mission and he's going and

snatching people out of this fire. But yet in His sovereignty, He is choosing to leave some in there to burn. He's glorified in that. But here's this crazy thing about this doctrine of sovereignty and predestination that they espouse. Is that in the logical educated intelligent view of this doctrine not only do you have to say that God chooses to rescue some and rescue others but ultimately if God is the one who created everything including every bit of sin that we see, God is ultimately the author of everything then not only is God the one rescuing the people from fire but he's the arsonist that set the fire to begin with. And to me that makes me so angry because that distorts the view of my heavenly father. He is not the arsonist.

(Pastor Ron) If you take the other side that God chooses, and we'll talk about it and look at a lot of verses in a second. Irresistible grace is one of the things that TULIP-- the acrostic they use. It means that those who are chosen have no decision. You have no choice. How do you have a love relationship like that? If I say 40 years ago, I found my wife and put a gun to her head and said, "You will be my wife...or you get a bullet in your head." Isn't that romantic? I'm a robot, I'm a manikin. I have no choice in it. God wants a love relationship. And everybody in the world has a chance to choosing. And you see why I'm angry tonight. I care about everyone in this room and I want them to have a choice. I want everyone to have a choice. And to think they don't have a choice, that just breaks my heart to think that. I don't know how you can espouse this doctrine and look at your neighbor and go, "I'm going to heaven, I'm chosen, too bad for you." How could you not hurt for them? That kills me. The danger of that is how does one to know if they are really serving God if you've really been chosen. So what does that do? That leaves you with uncertainty. What if at the end of the day God says, "You're not in." "But Why? I was good, I recognized Jesus." "But I didn't just choose you." Can you imagine the doubt and uncertainty that can leave a person with and that can create all kinds of emotional responses from an individual of not realizing you are chosen.

Give me that first power point that takes all hope away. I said something to Jim and I want to reiterate that. If this doctrine is taught, which again, a lot of the Calvinist churches in Bakersfield. It's a little dirty secret. They are not going to tell you everything it teaches. But this is the teaching. You can look it up when you get home TUPLP—that's the acrostic. This is the thing. Teenagers, no there are probably some Christian high schools that teach this. There are some Calvinist teachers that teach this. I know they do. Think if you are a student like me. I was

a little heathen. I sit in the classroom and hear this doctrine that some are chosen and the majority are not. If you are not chosen there is nothing you can do about it. Then I am certainly not chosen. When I was 18 I would have said well. That's it for me. God doesn't want me. Now potentially stay with me. When the bottom of my life drops out, kids already have a hard time with security and feeling good about themselves. When the bottom of my life drops out because I've been taught terrible doctrine, I can't even turn to God because He hasn't even chosen me, He doesn't love me. I think potentially has the power to add to a lot of suicidal situation. Because if you don't have hope, what do you turn to if you have been taught that God rejects the majority of people. What is going to happen with teenagers with all these hormones racing through them when they are down at the very very bottom of their life, the bottom of the barrel they are distraught, have divorced parents and they have no body who loves them and they have been taught this and they can't even turn to God because they haven't been chosen. Tell me what that's going to do to these kids. We always have them turn to God. Look at the next one, Jim. You take this. It undermines the forward progress of the church.

(Jim) You and I were talking about the church lady from Saturday night live. I remember her. "Aren't you special?" I will never forget the Santa Clause one. Santa.....Satan. But for the most part what's been happening is that we have fought this perception for a long time that we are better than other people. We refute that because there's nothing more special about us than any other person that is in this world. That God loves us all equally. That Christ died for all. That most unlovable person at work, Christ died for them. And so it's important to establish that. What this doctrine does is that it has this ability; I'm not saying that everyone who believes in this doctrine will be like this, but it sets you up to have a better than them attitude because you are chosen and they are not. You're in and they're not. So that obviously that is a struggle. We see that struggled demonstrated with Israelites. We see in Scripture God had His hand on them and chose them to display Himself to all the world and all the humanity back then. So what did they do? They looked at themselves as a nation that was chosen and were better than the rest of the world. That's where we got this Phariseeism attitude and looked at themselves as better than these Gentles. We are better than those Samaritans, because we are chosen and they're not. And this doctrine sets you up to have that same mindset in this world. In fact, I have to tell you that some Calvinist people I know tend to act like this. Whether they want see it in the mirror or not, I don't know. But from my perspective in how they treat me and how I see them treat other people. It's like we are the

enlightened ones, you are kind of uneducated, unbiblical oriented. We haven't figured it out because we are the "no" and the other people are not. So that is the danger behind that.

(Pastor Ron) I have got something to say, but let's look at the next two or three. It destroys the image of God. We already talked about that. (The next one, Matt) It stifles evangelism. We talked about that. Why would you evangelize, the ones God chosen they can't resist Grace so they are going to heaven.

(Jim) That's the commandments out of all commandments that Jesus told us to do. The exercise that he said go and make disciples out of all nations.

(Ron) We knew that the devil. If he can't get us with pornography, this is probably the next best way to get us to stop evangelizing. The Last one, I'm sorry that was not a real good one, but it's all I could think of. Sorry, it makes you sick. Jim, do you want to say something about John Calvin we are really treading on Holy Ground right now.

One of the things I've noticed about the reformation movement or the new Calvinism is there tends to be a mean spirit behind a lot of the interactions that I have seen from men like this. And I've always thought to myself, why is there such a mean spirit behind here. As I've kind of done my own investigation and I encourage you guys to do it too with the Internet and Amazon.com you can have books delivered to your house in two days. Amazon Prime, baby. That's awesome. We have access to all kinds of information. And so as I started unearthing a lot of the stuff about John Calvin himself I found out that he was a theologian but he also had kind of a mean spirit behind him, often times he would erupt when he came across different people with different viewpoints and interpretations of the Bible. One time in particular and this is a historical document, where this guy named Michael Sarvenis was preaching a different interpretation of some Bible verses. He says, "Hey if I have it my way and he comes into Geneva, he's not leaving alive." And later on we find out that he in fact, he was executed. Whether or not he did or did not I don't know, but he was this guru of Geneva and he had a council and anybody that had different Biblical interpretations they would somehow be tortured, executed, there would be brutality given to them, for anyone that viewed scripture different than him. I have a hard time with that. With people handing people that way when Jesus Christ demonstrated to us that we are to love even our enemies. Hello. How can we be standing on Biblical interpretation and doctrine and yet forsake one of the easiest pointed out things that Jesus tells us to do. Love our enemies. That disturbs me.

(Ron) John Calvin has been accused; all you have to do is go home and look on the Internet. He's been accused of killing people who disagreed with him Biblically. And Sarvenis when you talked about it, it's on the Internet, whether it is true or not, they said they burned him at the stake and used green wood so it would last longer, is what is on the Internet. Again it is in many different things. One Calvinist pastor here in town I had to remove as a friend from facebook I told you because one day I was out there and just encouraging people. I said something like the Lord is right there, just turn to him today and he loves you. He blasted me and took about five paragraphs to dismantle everything in the 3 lines I had said just because I was trying to encourage people. And I said, "If you're going to be that way, I've got the power." Peep. And I took him off. I was just trying to encourage people; I wasn't trying to make a theological statement. But right now, Jim, we have to move fast. We have to give them about 30 verses now. The doctrine of Calvinism they use an acrostic called TULIP and here's what they teach and I'll take the first one and then we'll talk. T is total depravity; the total inability of man to choose truth. Now Romans 10:17 Man, they say, is dead in their trespasses. So a dead person has no ability to respond to God. But what they don't understand is a verse like this. Faith comes from hearing and hearing from the Word of Christ. You can be dead in your transgressions, but once you hear the message preached, faith will come into your heart, supernatural faith, and you have the ability to be saved. Let's look at the next one James 1:21. "Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness in humility receive the word implanted which is able to save your souls." Duet 30:19, "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have sent before you life and death as a blessing and a curse so that you chose life so that you may live and your descendants." It's your choice. Psalm 119:30 "I have chosen the faithful way, I have placed your ordinances before me." Joshua 24:15 "If it is disagreeable in your site to serve the Lord, chose this day whom you will serve. Whether the Gods that your father served beyond the river or the gods of the Amorites where you are living. But for me and my house we will serve the Lord." That's a good one. John 1:12, "But as many as received him, to them He gave the right to become children of God. Even to those who believe in His name." That's the T in TULIP. Total depravity. That people can't choose God. We just showed you they could. Here's the thing about Calvinism, they just have a few verses they go on and we can explain every one of their verses. They can't explain ours. OK. The T in TULIP is total depravity; the U next is Unconditional Election. God selects those to be saved without any condition. So they don't even know if their kids are going to be chosen because it would be

conditional otherwise. So let's look at some verses. Is this true? John 3:16, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that **whoever** believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. Whoever. I Timothy 2:3-4, "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior who desire (how many?) all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth." I Timothy 2:5-6, "For there is one God and one mediator also between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for **all**, the testimony given at the proper time." II Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow about his promises as some count slowness but He is patient toward you not wishing for **anyone** to perish but for **all** to come to repentance." Stay with me. That's the Word of God. Say it with me....that's the Word of God. John 12:32, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw **all** men to myself." Hebrews 2:9, "But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely Jesus, because of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone." Who? Everyone. There's more but we're low on time. Go to the L in TULIP, Limited atonement. Christ died only for the elect. Jeremiah 53:6, "All of us like sheep have gone astray, each has turned to his own way, but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him." I Timothy 4:10, "But it is for this we labor and strive as we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men." Especially believers. I John 2:2, "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. Hebrews 2:9, "But we do see him who was made for a little lower than the angels (I think we already said that one didn't we). I Timothy 2:4, "Who desires all men to be saved who come to the knowledge of the truth." Some of these we've repeated a couple of them. Let's go to the I in TULIP; Irresistible grace. God's Grace for salvation cannot be resisted. Now this is so important. There are all kinds of verses I wrote. My guys came to me as I was teaching about Calvinism and said Pastor Ron do you have any verses about Calvinism and I flipped to the back of my Bible and I don't know if you can get a close up with that camera or not, but I said I got a few. Now as we go to the I, Irresistible grace. Now it says you can't resist God's Grace, alright. Matthew 23:37, "Jerusalem Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather your children together the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings and you were unwilling." Now you see you can't resist God's grace and yet they were unwilling, they were resisting God's grace. John 5:39-40, "You search the Scriptures because you think that of them you have eternal life. It is these that testify about me and you are **unwilling** to come to me." Irresistible grace, you are unwilling to come so that you

can have life. There is not irresistible grace, obviously. Let's go to Acts 7:51, "You men who are stiff necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit, you are doing just as your fathers did." Proverbs 1:24-26, "Because I called you and you refused," no irresistible grace, is there, "I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention and you neglected all my counsel and did not want my reproof. I will also laugh at your calamity, I'll mock when your dread comes." But see they had a chance, they refused. Proverbs 29:1, "A man who hardens his neck after much reproof will suddenly be broken beyond remedy." I want to go back, back into the sound room. I have you some verses earlier that I did skip over. Let's talk about a couple of their proof texts, a couple of them that they use. Really, It is usually Romans 9, (...garbled first Ephesian, first...Romans 9...) (35:00 on recording.) They don't have a whole lot. It's usually Romans 9. One of their proof texts is Matthew 22:14, "For many are called but few are chosen." It is a very weak text, but they use that. Tell me what's wrong with that and I'll pull up a couple key verses.

(Jim)What's wrong with that is the fact that is the fact that that's one verse taken out of context because that goes with, that is the moral of the story of a parable that Jesus gives us in Matthew 22. The parable is about a king and a king is able to do whatever he wants, correct, and he's the king so he can do whatever he wants. So this king invites all the rich snobby people to a banquet that he had and they didn't want to come, they were busy and had stuff on their schedules. So the king said I'm just going to go out and invite everyone who can make it, I don't care who they are, the poor the disabled, whoever, because I want my banquet room to be full and I want everyone to enjoy this meal that I have prepared. So everybody is invited to this feast, except for the fact that some people refused the invitation. So the few that are chosen were the ones that were actually the ones that accepted the invitation to begin with. I have chosen the ones who have chosen to be here with me. Those are the chosen. So if you want to be chosen, accept the invitation and you will be chosen.

(Pastor Ron) Jim was asking me tonight and I've taught this for years, pull up Matthew 22:8-10 and I'll tell you what Jim is talking about. (Jim reads) "Then he said to his slaves, the wedding was ready but those who were invited were not worthy. The slaves went out into the streets and gathered all they found both evil and good and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests." (Ron) They went out to get everybody they could find, everybody they could find. Jim asked me the other day, Ron, where did you get that teaching at about divine election that I've

taught for a long time. I said as I was working my way through the bible when I was very young, I just asked God to teach me and he taught me. And Jim said that's the exact teaching that C.S. Lewis teaches.

(Jim), Ya, the idea is the foreknowledge from the that book *Mere Christianity*, great book.

(Ron) Their other big text is in Romans 9 and they'll use this one a lot. In the womb, God loved Jacob and hated Esau. Do you want to explain that?

(Jim) Ya, if you look at the book of Romans, specifically chapters 9-11. Paul is trying to give us the character of God. That whole proof in 9-11 is trying to show the Jews that God was doing something crazy in allowing everyone into heaven. This was a very hard concept for these stiff necked Jews to understand, that other people were being accepted by God, because they were the only special ones. And so he had to kind of show them that hey if God wants to bring other people in, He has the ability to do that and so He was talking to them through the nations and the unfortunate thing is that when we read Scripture, we read it from an individualistic mindset because of our culture. We look at everything through this self-centeredness. And that focus, or looking through that lens actually will have a huge impact on how we interpret Scripture.

(Ron) You know, Jim, that is so true, see our worldview affects the way we view Scripture. And we don't ever look in that light of corporate salvation and stuff, but I took. What they do is they just take Romans 9, they don't bother to look at 10 and 11. In Romans 9 itself, I circled, and this is only in the first few verses, Brethren, kinsmen, Israelites, Israel, Abraham's descendants, Jacob, Israel. It's talking about a nation here. He's not talking about individuals Jacob and Esau, he's talking about Israel and the Edomites. In chapter 11 when it goes on it say, this is the same topic, I say then God has not rejected His people has he? May it never be, for I too, am an Israelite, a descendent of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected His people who he foreknew. His people, talking about a nation, not individuals. Because our mindset is so removed from the Jewish mindset, when we see that we think this is individuals and salvation. But there is a word you must learn and it is exegesis Scripture, it's also Biblical hermeneutics, you don't take one passage and make doctrine out of it. You can't. And then number two, exegesis means you take something over here and over here and over here and put it together to make a whole. When Paul made tents, he would take material from over here of a goat and over here of an oxen, and put it all together. You exegete it and make a rug or something out of it. And that's what good

Bible teachers do. So as we end this, and we gave you a lot of verses tonight, do you understand this is our job? We are commanded to do this. Can you feel the hatred a shepherd has for this? And can you feel our hurt when you look at your next door neighbor, some of the nicest people in the world but they don't want Jesus, they are so nice, and you look at their faces and say God has not chosen you and can't do a thing about it. And He made you to scream and yell in pain for ever and ever and ever and He is glorified in that. Does that not make you sick to your stomach? Because we love people, we are made in God's image. We love everybody. I'm so glad that we're not going to let this stop us evangelizing. We're going to go out and win all the people we can win with the Gospel of the good news. What is, what is the hilarious good news? What's good news about that message they have? None. The good news I have is that everybody in the world Jesus died for your sins. If you will accept him today he will give you new life and you'll live for ever and ever and ever. Yes, yes, I believe that. But the devil has to stop that some way. And now like the guy said, the Presbyterian guy said as he was talking to my friend. I'm not saying that all Presbyterian people believe this but this particular guy was. He said, "My church thinks it's a waste of time to evangelize." So the devil has not been able to get us through pornography and sin now he's going to get us through the church saying "why evangelize? God's purposes are going to be done because His grace is irresistible. Everybody he's chosen is going to heaven. So I hope you understand our heart. Sunday I'm coming back. I'm forgetting this. Of course others are not going to forget it. I'm going to be on the roasting post, so defend me ok. You're going to see me on the Internet; I'm going to be roasted now. Thank you, thank you, thank you. There are going to attack my education, they will attack everything about me, but that's OK. Have at it. If God is for me, who can be against me? And that's the end of that topic. The last word is yours and then we'll pray.

(Jim) I have a picture, I don't know if they can put that picture up. I did this to you guys before, Matt, if you can put that picture up of that creature. I don't know how many of you were here when I did this before. But what do you guys see? How many see a duck? How many see a rabbit? Now some of you who saw the duck when I said rabbit said awwwww I see it. Some of you who said rabbit, when I said duck, all of a sudden said I see it too. See the idea is how we view something is predicated on our perspective (joking about dinner of roasted duck). So here is the scary part. When you unravel the character of God, when you distort the image of God, everything that you believe in, regarding God, the Bible, in Jesus, it all gets distorted. And this is what really makes me very, very angry at this doctrine. It is majorly distorting the image of God

who is displayed perfectly in Jesus Christ. And Jesus displays us that God would rather die than to be without us. And that is the most beautiful picture of our God that you could ever paint. That is the image I want all of you as believers to have about God. That He loves you so much that He would rather die so that you could be with him for all eternity. He loves you, he loves you with an everlasting love. Amen.

(Ron) Instead Him of killing people that didn't agree with him, he went to the cross. Instead of murdering, he was murdered so that all of us would not get what was coming to us. And that is ultimate love. Tell these people because some would say they are not Calvinists but I could go on the Internet and show where they said they are Calvinists. But what are some other names they go by instead of Calvinists?

(Jim) Ya, I mentioned that earlier but they'll call themselves reformist, the reformation movement, reformed doctrine, and reformed theology. I'm bummed that they use the Gospel Coalition because they are kind of bringing the Gospel in and branding it through their view of God which I think is horrible. That is not the Gospel. The Gospel is what we taught you guys tonight. That God died for everyone and that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. That, my friend, is the Gospel. The Gospel Coalition, there's a church planning movement out there. A lot of young pastors trying to start churches out there are under this brand, Acts 29. I'm not saying that all the Acts 29 church plants believe in Calvinism, but I would probably say that a majority of them do. But again, they are not saying it because it is a view of God that for some body that is not a believer, and some of you who are not a believer tonight perhaps, if that was God I want nothing to do with him. And you know what, I'm with you with that. If that was the only view I had of God I would say no thank you. Because you can say a lot about God but you can't say He's a god of love if that's the kind of God he is. He's a tyrant.

(Pastor Ron) Jim, something I just thought of that we prayed tonight before we came out here tonight. Like I say, there are dozens of these churches out here in Bakersfield and you won't know. There's a dirty little secret and nobody wants to tell you what Calvinism stands for. But again, you ask them the question, "Do you believe in divine election as John Calvin taught it?" Now you say why are you so particular about this Pastor Ron? I've always said it's important the church you go to. If you go to a church that believes likes that and you ask them to pray for your little sister's baby, deep in their mind if they think that baby is not chosen you'll probably not get

a lot of prayer. So it's going to affect a lot of different things, ok? They are not going to evangelize. They're not going to come out and serve in September and try to serve the city. They are not going to go out to do block parties and get people saved. It's not going to happen. It was one of those guys, I'm not going to use any names, but he said that evangelism is stupid. It does, it is important where you go to church. Again I hate to say that because they've been knocking me for years saying "leave that church." They call me that Mega Pastor. That Mega Pastor. And they tell people leave this church, leave this church, because they don't agree with our doctrine. I never said anything like that. But now the measure you meet out may come back and bite you. You be careful because you don't want to attend a church that has that belief system. So what do you ask them? Do you believe in election the way John Calvin believes in it? That's a yes or no answer. If they start taking you around the bush, they've already for you, ok. So we love you, all we want is the truth, I'm coming back Sunday, forget all this. They are going to keep it going. I'm not. I'm coming back and preaching on love and integrity on Sunday. We're going to keep going forward, loving our community. That's what we're going to do. You can close in prayer. Your altar calls get more people than me so you can close in prayer.

(Jim) Let's pray. We just thank you so much that we can just pause and talk about something like this tonight. And I know some people came here tonight and maybe this conversation made them rethink a lot of things. And I know as we prayed before we came out that you showed us some people that were really lost about whether or not you loved them. God I know the side impact of this message was that you confirmed that you loved them wholehearted, that you were willing to die for them. I pray that you would just minister to our hearts right now.

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Commentary at end

(Jim) There you have it. We hope that was very informative for you. We specifically did not get to P and that was to be honest with you we kind of agree with that point, right Ron?

(Ron) TULIP is T-U-L-I-P and the reason we didn't get to the P and we didn't explain that in the service is because I didn't have any notes on the P. Perseverance of the Saints. We tend to probably agree with that more than we don't and so that's why we didn't mention it. You had a couple points you had told me after the service and I think those need to be reiterated for the people.

(Jim) One of the key verses that I think really unravels the whole idea of Calvinism as verse in Ezekiel 33:11 from ASV, “As surely as I live declares the sovereign Lord, (I like that) I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways. Why will you die oh house of Israel?”

(Pastor Ron) It’s like God is pleading, it’s like our heavenly father pleading. That’s His spirit you just captured, there.

(Jim) Yes, and I think it completely unravels this whole idea of this predestination doctrine that is so destructive and is heresy on steroids in my mind. So that, in addition to the whole book of Hosea. You want to read a good love story, read the book of Hosea in your Bible because it is such a picture of God’s redeeming love. That here Hosea is marrying a prostitute and believing that she is going to turn from her ways and she goes back. Yet he pursues her and takes her back after she does all these horrible things. And that is the picture that God says he wants people to have of Him and His pursuit for His people. And I want that to be your image of God and how you view God in everything that you go through in your life. That He, my friend, loves you and He will pursue as hard and as much as he needs to until you turn from your ways and you give your life to him because He loves you. Any closing thoughts, Ron?

(Pastor Ron) I was just thinking too, I know we said this in the service. We believe in the divine sovereignty of God, we believe God chooses, our only problem with Calvinism is we don’t think that God chooses without us choosing Him and everybody has that right. And so those that choose God, He chooses them. And so I think in the end, I was just thinking the other day, you know I don’t believe in predestination the way they teach it because I was predestined not to believe in that predestination. I think that’s the way I can put it.