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By the Grace of Jesus:

Regeneration and Conversion

The Reverend Dr Graham J Whelan OAM

Preface

Academic Dean Harvey C Pittman Ph. D. of International Seminary comments on this work following this preface. The Reverend Dr Graham J Whelan is a Minister of the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ and a Pastor Emeritus at LifeHouse Church (An assemblies of God in Australia Church) in Coffs Harbour, NSW, Australia.

As an Ex-Serviceman, Reverend Dr Whelan serves as Padre to the Returned and Services League of Australia (RSL in Coffs Harbour).

Reverend Dr Whelan is the author of the dissertation:

“Our Righteousness and Wisdom Completely in Jesus”

In that work he observed that more Scriptural analysis was needed in relation to the Doctrine of Effectual Calling and Grace. This could not be analysed in the work noted above, as it was not the main focus.

Hence the work that follows Dr Pittman’s Commentary:

“By the Grace of Jesus:
Regeneration and Conversion”



INTERNATIONAL SEMINARY

Commentary

Read with great interest this excellent critique of Willard J. Erickson's work on "effectual calling, conversion and regeneration", from his famous work "Christian Theology". Dr. Graham Whelan has carefully analysed Dr. Erickson's logical order or sequence concerning God's election and of redeeming His people. Dr. Whelan turns to the Scriptures to establish God's purpose of election and salvation. The plan of God is the redemption of the elect. Careful and detailed scriptural analysis in John 1:1-18, where it is evident that regeneration comes before conversion and in Romans 3:10-12, where there is no awareness or growth until after regeneration, are only possible after being born again and filled with the Holy Spirit.

Since everything is God's initiative, we learn that Jesus causes the change. The astute observations by Dr. Whelan, based on careful scriptural analysis, challenges Dr. Erickson's "logical order" by putting regeneration before conversion. His sound reasoning has strong academic merit, based on the Scriptures, and deserves serious consideration by all who cherish and attempt to understand the Word of God.

To have a former student with such depth of perception, and ability to carefully analyse what his interests have set before him resulting in a revision of the Doctrine of Effectual Calling and Grace, is truly a heavenly blessing to his mentor and teacher and a wonderfully satisfying experience.

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OUTLINE

I. An introduction

A. All Wisdom in Jesus

Reference to previous dissertation with focus Romans 3:10-12. Aim of previous dissertation that Jesus our wisdom – our righteousness, holiness and salvation re-emphasised.

B. Election the Positive Side of Predestination

Discussion on election and doctrine of Effectual Calling and Grace and Erickson's discussion on logical order – effectual calling, conversion, regeneration commenced.

C. Erickson's Logical Order Questioned

Analysis of Erickson's thoughts revisited. Question of logical order focussing on conversion, regeneration or regeneration conversion discussed.

II. Erickson's Logical Order: Effectual Calling, Conversion, Regeneration – Revisited

A. God's Initiative Regeneration – Man's Response Conversion

God's sovereignty emphasised – that the elect are “born of God” as a baby must be born before it breathes so each elect must be “born again” first before each “spiritually breathes”, knows and grows.

B. Human Inability Taken Seriously

Focus that elect given by Father to Son emphasised (Jn 6:37, 65).

III. Sovereignty of God

Focus on sovereignty of God, sovereignty of Jesus emphasised.

A. God's name

Name of YAHWEH (Ex 3:14), emphasis on Jesus
second Person YAHWEH, eternal Living Word
overviewed.

B. God's sovereign will

Complexity and passion of God for sinner's independence, disobedience discussed.

C. God's omnipotence

God's authority, power over everything including evil discussed. Truth of Romans 3:10-12 acknowledged concerning humankind's ability to save themselves revisited.

D. Predestination and election

Way in which God in Jesus answers problem of evil focusing on key area predestination, election examined.

E. Adoption

Sovereignty, eternal grace of Jesus in adoption examined with appropriate references.

F. Scripture

Scripture as special revelation, important subject in key area of sovereignty of God re Jesus' mission, divine initiative and purpose of redemption, salvation of elect and God's plan described by Scripture with Jesus humankind's righteousness, wisdom and eternal Saviour discussed.

G. Effectual call

Doctrines demonstrating sovereignty of God, His eternal Son and Saviour of elect, of Jesus' effectual calling and grace examined, discussed.

IV. Deity of Christ

Preceding discussion sovereignty of God now leads, supports truth of deity of Jesus as Son of God, eternal second Person YAHWEH (Jn 1:1; Lk 24:27 cf OT refs discussed), examined.

A. Wisdom and God's choosing in Christ

Through faithfulness (righteousness), and obedience (wisdom) believers – those born again – the elect, never lose adoption, inheritance, salvation (Jn 10:29) discussed.

B. Given by God the Father to God the Son

Jesus as eternal Saviour for all humankind's history (Mt 1:21) noted.

C. Effectual call – the true wisdom of God in Jesus

From key area sovereignty of God above, doctrine of effectual calling examined with focus on deity of Christ discussed with references.

D. God's righteousness and wisdom complete in Jesus – our adoption

From chapter above, key area sovereignty of God, further discussion on adoption of elect, their

righteousness, wisdom complete in Jesus for all eternity
– both Old and New covenants, examined.

E. Jesus the righteousness of God

Jesus, Son of God, eternal second Person YAHWEH (LORD), eternal righteousness of God examined with references.

F. Jesus the wisdom of God

Jesus, Son of God, eternal second Person YAHWEH (LORD), eternal wisdom of God examined with appropriate references.

G. Wisdom of Jesus: life – wisdom of world: death

Comparison wisdom in Jesus, compared to worldly wisdom discussed with references. Attributes of Jesus, Son of God eternal second Person YAHWEH also highlights His eternity, pre-existence and with elect always (Mt 28:20) emphasised. Jesus attribute of life examined (Jn 1:4; 5:26; 14:6) emphasised. Jesus in creation (Ge 1:1 cf Jn 1:1; Col 1:15-20) noted.

H. Calling and regeneration

Inspiration of Holy Spirit given by Jesus and guidance for faith, obedience discussed.

I. Repentance and faith

Prerequisite repentance for entering kingdom and salvation in Jesus discussed.

J. Justification

Doctrine of justification expanded from section “Definitions”, acknowledging pardoning of sins through belief in Jesus, His atoning sacrifice for the elect, discussed.

K. Sanctification

Sanctification explained with comments opposing liberal theologians’ error. Emphasis Jesus our righteousness discussed.

L. Grace and mercy

God's grace and mercy for sinner who turns in repentance and faith discussed with references.

M. Goodness

God's glory, goodness defined, discussed.

N. Righteousness and justice

God perfectly holy, just, hates sin, loves sinner noted.

O. Truthfulness and faithfulness

Jesus satisfies God's justice as propitiation for believer's sin emphasised with references.

P. Old Testament prophecy

God's covenant loyalty and offering of His Son (Messiah) as atoning sacrifice (propitiation) through Old Testament history noted.

Q. New Testament witness to Jesus

Specific New Testament Scripture references which witness to Christ's deity tabulated, discussed.

R. Unbelieving liberal misconceptions

Previous comments on self-righteous, self-centredness continued with liberal misconceptions and teaching on deity of Jesus, noted.

S. The Truth of the Resurrection

Truth of fact of resurrection substantiated, examined, discussed.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

All Wisdom in Jesus

In a previous dissertation “Our Righteousness and Wisdom Completely in Jesus” by Graham J Whelan¹ reference was made to the truth:

“There is no-one righteous, not even one; there is no-one who understands, no-one who seeks God. All have turned away,...no-one does good, not even one.” (Rom 3:10-12)

The aim of the dissertation was to prove that Jesus is the wisdom that is righteousness, holiness and redemption of the elect and that He is the eternal Son of God revealed to those elect foreordained and predestined as elect by God. The aim of this next work is to comment on and correct and to address Erickson’s logical order as

¹ Graham John Whelan, “Our Righteousness and Wisdom Completely in Jesus”. (Ph D Diss, International Seminary, Plymouth, Fla, 2005), 135-224

he describes it as effectual calling, conversion and regeneration.²

Jesus is the eternal Living Word and second Person of YAHWEH (LORD) (Jn 1:1-18; Col 1:15-20). The focus was on the passage 1 Cor 1:18-31 supported by the truth of Luke 24:27 and associated Old Testament references. One Old Testament truth is from Isaiah 6 which truly highlights God's future redemptive work of salvation by the grace of Jesus. (Is 6:8-10; cf Is 29:18; 35:5):

“...Tell this people: ‘Be ever hearing but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving...’
(Is 6:9)

This author is greatly encouraged by this passage and initially comments on the words in verse 8:

“Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying ‘whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’” (Is 6:8).

² Millard J Erickson, Christian Theology. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1998), p 941ff

This author suggests that these words – voice of the “Lord” – were spoken by Jesus. Jesus the eternal second Person of YAHWEH (LORD) – Jesus the eternal Living Word (Jn 1:1). This author also emphasises this is an important point as Scripture always encourages us to listen to Jesus (Dt 18:15; Mk 9:7; Jn 10:27). Further in the parable of the sower (Mk 4:1-25), Jesus quotes the words from Isaiah spoken to Isaiah seven hundred years before He came on His mission to save. He teaches in a parable which is an illustration of spiritual responsiveness. And Jesus teaches that to “see” highlights the opening of spiritual eyes which were blind by nature, to the truth of God, and allowing the elect to “see” the spiritual truth which, in turn, emphasises the reality that they have “heard”- that they have received the spiritual illumination through the Holy Spirit who alone can open spiritually blind eyes.

Election the Positive Side of Predestination

One of the key areas of Theology examined in the dissertation quoted above concerned the doctrine of predestination

focusing on the positive side of predestination, namely election. One of the main authors discussed was Erickson and his logical order of the elements in the doctrine of effectual calling and grace – effectual calling, conversion and regeneration. His views about these elements above are discussed in two key areas which have been analysed by this author and are discussed in detail below in two chapters – firstly, the Sovereignty of God, and secondly the Deity of Christ. Further in the original dissertation quoted above it was not necessary for this author to enter into a debate concerning the doctrine of effectual calling and grace as it was not the focus of the dissertation.

However, whilst examining Scripture on this subject, this author returns to Erickson's thoughts on these elements because this author has developed differing thoughts about the order which were not relevant for the subject at the time but on careful study need to be addressed now. This author thus discusses the question of order – conversion, then regeneration or regeneration then conversion?

Erickson's Logical Order Questioned

This discussion and order is the subject of this review of Erickson's work noted above. However, this author acknowledges To

So when discussing Erickson's logical order – effectual calling, conversion and regeneration, the question is, is his order correct? To this author the initial focus always comes back to Paul's truth in Romans 3:10-12 above. The significance of Paul's truth is highlighted by this author by the word "...no-one can ...come to God on their own" and "...salvation in no way depends on humans or what they do ..."

These truths are commented on later.

CHAPTER 2

ERICKSON'S LOGICAL ORDER: EFFECTUAL CALLING, CONVERSION, REGENERATION – REVISITED

God's Initiative Regeneration – Man's Response Conversion

This author has to acknowledge the sovereignty of God and that of man, as a result of the Fall, has no ability to render himself righteous or seek God on his own – indeed mankind cannot. (Rom 3:10-12). This author cannot overemphasise these verses – they are critical to the truth of man's condition. As the gift of new birth “born of God” occurs first this order is specific – thus regeneration then conversion. It is important for this author to emphasise that in our finite minds we must never devalue the sovereignty of God. You might ask the question – Would that ever be the case? Would Christians or Christian theologians ever do that? Well, from this author's study – yes. This is why this author has included the chapters, “Sovereignty of God” and “Deity of Christ” from the previous dissertation. Also, especially noting the section “Unbelieving Liberal Misconceptions”. In Chapter 4 – The Fall was total –

body, mind and spirit were all affected. When we use our minds to reason, we are using reason that now is influenced by sin. Thus the Fall has implications for Erickson's logical order and this is the subject of this whole discussion.

So the reality is that everything is God's initiative. This author focuses on regeneration then conversion as the order. This is reinforced by John's truth:

“(Father) ...has made Him known” (John 1:18).

Here the Greek is translated ‘that one (ie Father) declared Him (Jesus)’, where ‘declare’ highlights spiritual illumination that the spiritually blind heart through the grace of Jesus, will see Jesus. Jesus causes the change. This is further noted in John 6:40 where ‘sees’ (RSV) is from the Greek ‘beholding’ reflecting the heart regenerated in order to be obedient to Jesus through faith given at regeneration. Here this author emphasises that the grace offered by Jesus to the elect is not of human choosing. Again Jesus causes the change. This is confirmed by Jesus' truth (Jn 2:24-25) explaining the human condition as a result of the Fall, as discussed above, namely

total inability to understand without being born from above. God's election of His chosen is His initiative as sovereign God – His initiative alone.

The Father's authority to the Son (Jn 15:9-10) concerning their initiative in election is confirmed in the truth of the Gospel of John. Thus when John records about the truth of how Jesus teaches Nicodemus, we are drawn to the reality "... No one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again." (Jn 3:3). The Greek for this 'born again' focuses on 'birth from above' where the Greek, according to Souter emphasises the male aspect 'beget' defining the divine initiative of the Father through the Son, the only Saviour. The truth of Acts 4:12 is noted again. Thus a further focus on John 5:21 concerning the giving of life.

"For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom He is pleased to give it." (Jn 5:21).

Here in this verse it is clear that the theology refers to the gift of Jesus as He is life, of Him, in Him and the abundant life only

possible through Him. This is given now (literally in the ‘now’” – the moment of regeneration which is instantaneous) to the elect, in addition to the eternal life through our future resurrection. It is also clear being dead in sin through the Fall indicates a total inability on behalf of humanity and the individuals’ elect to do anything for themselves. Hence this author’s original comments in the previous dissertation, and above in this work concerning liberal self-righteousness and self-centredness and the liberal scholarly and non-scholarly error of universalism revisited later.

Human Inability Taken Seriously

The disastrous reality of human inability when compared to the sovereignty of God is mind blowing. Thus also even though it sounds redundant it’s important that this author again emphasises our human inability in context of the truth of Romans 3:10-12. Not fully acknowledging this truth of the sovereignty of God has led many into liberal error. This is discussed in the section “Unbelieving Liberal Misconceptions” in Chapter 4. Thus as this author further focuses on election. Firstly there are the amazing verses concerning Jesus the

bread of life (Jn 6:35) where Jesus sustains those chosen. This truth is evident as Jesus continues to make clearer that the Father does the giving and Jesus does the sustaining when they are born again and come to Him:

“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.” (Jn 6:37)

The elect are regenerated then they know and answer His call as the process of conversion begins. To this author the effectual call is part of the “hearing” and “sealing” of regeneration (Eph 1:11, 13). This discussion touches on this truth in several places that the elect are given by the Father to the Son. The Father enables His chosen to answer the call:

“He went on to say, ‘This is why I told you that no-one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.’” (Jn 6:65)

Once having been regenerated (the enabling), the elect can then respond to the call (the response and beginning of the

process of conversion). These insights are also discussed further when examining the Westminster Confession and the Doctrine of Effectual Calling and Grace.

REGENERATION	as opposed to	CONVERSION
God's work		Man's response
Sovereignly given		Conditional
Eternal life		Fellowship
One time		Repeated
Inward work		Outward evidence
Complete at once		Growth

In God's work of regeneration the person chosen – each elect – is unable of themselves to come to Jesus unless through regeneration each is enabled. The regenerated person does not realise what is happening until he/she has been enlightened later on. Unless one is born – one cannot breathe, cannot know, cannot perceive. This is an emphasis discussed with this author by The Reverend Silas Horton - minister to this author during his youth and his mentor on a continuing basis. Jesus, through the Father's authority, gives knowledge and spiritual illumination to "see" Jesus.

“For my Father’s will is that for everyone who looks (sees, RSV) to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. (Jn 6:40).

In other words, not only does a person have to have knowledge of Jesus’ actions on their behalf, they also have to perceive the significance of those actions. Not all witnesses to Jesus’ death and resurrection believed in Him as Lord and Saviour. Seeing and believing here confirms regeneration in the mind of the elect. The regenerated person knows of the change as a result of responding to the call. At this stage each person may not be aware that each response was pre-ordained. The faith each has been given has prompted each one to accept God’s invitation. This is all confirming the truth that regeneration, which includes God’s effectual call, is the work of God. Take, for example, two people listening to the same sermon/message. One responds, the other doesn’t. God has worked in the heart of the one who has responded. The regenerated person is then able to be converted from a life without God at the centre, to a life with God as the central focus of their being. As the new believer matures he/she becomes aware that God has chosen them from the

beginning. The new believer matures and grows – the conversion process has begun – they now know they have the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16; 1 Jn 2:20-22, 27). The new believer eventually comes to the realisation through the Holy Spirit, that they did not do the original choosing:

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last.” (Jn 15:16 NIV).

This highlights and emphasises what has been said before – this is God’s sovereignty in action – God’s initiative in election. The truth is that belonging to Jesus is His initiative alone. Jesus causes the change. This is a great comfort to the elect when they come to that point of regeneration where they “know” they belong and are His – a situation that could not be “known” before God called or drew them to Himself in regeneration:

“...but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me ...” (Jn 10:26-27).

This clearly points to the teaching that they cannot hear because they have not been born again. (Jn 3:3).

In discussing Erickson's logical order of effectual calling, conversion and regeneration, this author again refers to the Westminster Confession, in particular 10:1 "Of effectual calling". This states:

In this discussion, on Erickson's logical order, this author suggests that M Thus from the point of acknowledging the sovereignty of God, which is discussed again in the following chapter, this author suggests a revision of the Doctrine of Effectual Calling and Grace in the Westminster Confession 10.1 as follows:

This author now includes the following two chapters from a previous dissertation.³ These are included because of the critical need to focus on the sovereignty of God. There is also a need to focus on the difference between the Calvinist and Arminian⁴ views and how these views acknowledge the sovereignty of God. There is also the need to highlight the difference between the terms “regeneration” and “conversion”.

³ Graham John Whelan, “Our righteousness and Wisdom Completely in Jesus”. (Ph. D. Diss., International Seminary, Plymouth, Fla 2005), 135-224

⁴ https://www.google.com.au/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&rlz=1C1CHBD_en-GBAU718AU718&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=Arminian

CHAPTER 3

SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

Firstly in this chapter this author⁵ establishes the sovereignty of God which primarily includes the sovereignty of Jesus the eternal second Person of God. This proves Jesus' Lordship with appropriate references relating to essential doctrines which in the next chapter, The Deity of Jesus, compliment the truth that He is our righteousness and wisdom for all time. This author emphasises "all time" to include Old Covenant and New Covenant truth as taught by Luke 24:27. (Ge 3:15; Nu 21:9; Dt 18:15; Is 7:14; 9:6; 40:10; Is 53; Ezek 34:23; Da 9:24; Mic 7:20; Mal 3:1) already mentioned for emphasis. Also in this chapter this author links the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. This author focuses on key areas of God's name, God's sovereign will, God's omnipotence, predestination of the elect and adoption. The Theological significance in the key area of the Sovereignty of God focussing on effectual calling and grace is examined centring on Lordship of Jesus.

⁵ Graham John Whelan, "Our Righteousness and Wisdom Completely in Jesus". (Ph. D. Diss., International Seminary, Plymouth, Fla 2005), 135-224. This chapter and the following chapter are included in this work in their entirety to revisit the truth that the One True God of the Bible, Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the one only God – there is no other (Is 45:5). All other gods are of the devil. The following chapter tells the truth about Jesus the Son of God – the elect's only and complete wisdom – righteousness, holiness and redemption. Analysis in most of the sub-headings is retained to totally support the truth that the God of the Bible is sovereign.

God's Name

God is sovereign and this author focuses firstly on God's name. In revelation, Erickson explains that this is where God demonstrates His Sovereignty and he focuses on special revelation. Special revelation is personal where God reveals Himself in time and place. The personal relationship is emphasised by Erickson when God responded by "giving His name 'I am who I am (or I will be who I will be) (Ex 3:14.)"⁶ This author highlights the Name of YAHWEH, for this name emphasises the concealed Name of the eternal Living Word, who is revealed in His New Covenant (Jn 1). As a personal God, He made a personal covenant with His people. In addition, He blessed them "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace" (Num 6:24-26). Special revelation records where God has spoken and historical events have been recorded, notably the mighty deeds of the deliverance of His people from Egypt. This is expanded further in Erickson's discussion on divine speech and his comments on Paul (1 Cor 7:40; 11:23), but

⁶ Millard J Erickson, Christian Theology. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1998), p 203.

reaches the ultimate level of special revelation in the incarnation where the Lord Jesus, God as man, speaks face to face with His brothers and sisters. Here His words are written down as Scripture as revelation. Further, this author notes Jesus uses the words “I AM” on seven occasions (Jn 6:35; 8:12; 10:7, 11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1) confirming in this author’s Christian mind, through the Holy Spirit, the truth of Jesus’ words as Living Word spoken to Moses, “I will be ...” (Ex 3:14). Jesus was and is.

Concerning Ephesians 2:5-8 this author adds the comment that indeed Jesus gives the believer faith as in the reference quoted by Luke where he cites Peter’s words as Peter heals the crippled beggar – “By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through Him that has given this complete healing to him...” (Acts 3:16). This confirms the truth in Ephesians 2:8-9.

Piper adds to Erickson and discusses God’s will and its awesome complexities. He explains the deep compassion God has for those who have turned from Him to be

independent and disobedient. He cites Lamentations 3:32 “though He causes grief, He will have compassion according to the abundance of His steadfast love; for He does not willingly inflict or grieve the sons of men.” Here, this author, can appreciate the difficulty which Piper is explaining, in that to the human mind there is enormous conflict. But as Piper explains, “God is governed by the depth of His wisdom expressed through a plan that no ordinary human deliberation would ever conceive.”⁷ He cites Romans 11:33f.

God’s Omnipotence

Also, on the subject of the sovereignty of God, Erickson discusses that God alone is omnipotent, having authority and power over everything including evil done by Satan and as a result the reality of the magnitude of sin. The universality of sin has already been clearly seen in God’s resolution to destroy “everything (with the exception of Noah, his family and the animals ...)”⁸ (Ge 6:5). Further emphasised by God’s truth “every inclination of [man’s] heart [as being] evil from

⁷ John Piper, “Are There Two Wills in God?” in Still Sovereign eds. Thomas R. Schreiner, Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000) p 129

⁸ Millard J. Erickson, Christian Theology. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), p 638

childhood.”⁹ (Ge 8:21). Erickson further highlights a categorical statement about human sinfulness “found in 1 Kings 8:46 ‘for there is no one who does not sin.’” (cf Rom 3:23).¹⁰

Psalm 30:3 also adds to this thought “if you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O LORD, who could stand?”

Thus Erickson continues and explains “evil actions and words stem from the evil, that’s evil thoughts of the heart: ‘but the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart ... out of the heart come evil thoughts’ ... (Mt 15:18f)”¹¹ Erickson goes further with reference to the inclination of a man’s heart by commenting on what Paul had to say about the “Gentiles that they are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts ...” (Eph 4:18f). Erickson further explains that “we do not mean by total depravity that the unregenerate person is totally insensitive in matters of conscience, of right and wrong,”¹² and he goes on to comment on what Paul wrote in Romans 2:15. This author

⁹ Ibid., 639

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 644

¹² Ibid.

acknowledges the truth here that no-one can stand before or come to God on their own (Rom 3:10-12).¹³

Predestination and Election

This author turns attention to the way God in Jesus answers the problem of evil and this author focuses on election and the work of Erickson. Erickson discusses the key area of predestination and election under the major subject – Salvation in his chapter – The Antecedent of Salvation: Predestination. In that chapter he emphasises that the whole subject falls within the major key area of the Sovereignty of God, and thus, this author includes it here, along with discussions from other authors. Erickson further emphasises the sovereignty of God.

Erickson explains that predestination refers to God's choice of individuals for eternal life or eternal death. To assist understanding, election is selection of some for eternal life, the positive side of predestination.

¹³ It is at this starting point that this author, qualifying the previous dissertation, moves to emphasise that mankind cannot initiate his or her salvation. Thus the need to revisit Erickson's logical order of effectual calling, conversion and regeneration.

Before examining what Erickson explains about predestination and election this author sees the need to discuss foreknowledge. In Erickson's chapter in *Christian Theology – What God Does*, he discusses God's plan, making the distinction between the broader term "foreordain" and the narrower term "predestinate" having to do with election. Erickson cites 1 Peter 1:2 "The elect are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God."¹⁴ Westblade comments on this view. Westblade in Schreiner has some interesting comments concerning God's infallible foreknowledge. He poses the question – Can everyone choose freely "to exercise faith and so fulfil God's desire that all should be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth?"¹⁵ Concentrating on that freedom, Westblade cites Jonathan Edwards who commented "infallible knowledge of an event presupposes the necessity of that event and therefore precludes its real freedom." Westblade proceeds and cites Foster and Marston "insistence that the Bible nowhere uses the word 'know or foreknow' to mean 'choose' or 'elect' ...,¹⁶ even though as

¹⁴ Millard J Erickson, *Christian Theology*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), p 383

¹⁵ Donald J Westblade, "*Divine Election in the Pauline Literature*." In *Still Sovereign* eds. Thomas R Schreiner, Bruce A Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), p 71

¹⁶ *Ibid*.

Westblade comments that in Romans 8:29 there is “certainty of future events.”¹⁷ This author observes that it is difficult for us in our time to really understand God’s omniscience in His eternity, given that the product of time that He has made for man cannot be reasoned by man’s finite mind to the awesome concept of God’s eternity. Thus, this author agrees with Schreiner’s footnote that “in Morris’ words, summarising his reading on this verse, ‘we are not to think that God can take action only when we graciously give Him permission. Paul is saying that God initiates the whole process.’”¹⁸

Now returning to predestination and election, Erickson begins by commenting that “of all the doctrines of Christian faith, certainly one of the most puzzling and least understood is the doctrine of predestination”¹⁹, and that it “exceeds the human capacity to understand.”²⁰ Further Erickson defines predestination, explaining that “although some use it interchangeably with ‘foreordination’ and ‘election’, for our purpose here ‘predestination’ is midway in specificity between ‘foreordination’ and ‘election’. ... ‘Predestination’ refers to

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Thomas R Schreiner, Bruce A Ware, eds Still Sovereign. (Grand Rapids, Mich, Baker Books, 200), p71

¹⁹ Millard J Erickson, Christian Theology. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1998) p 921

²⁰ Ibid.

God's choice of individuals for eternal life or eternal death. 'Election' is selection of some for eternal life, the positive side of predestination."²¹ The doctrine's history is discussed (Palegius and Augustine), and comments on as Adam has sinned so we have all sinned, thus Erickson comments that this means that all human beings "begin life in a seriously marred condition."²² (Rom 3:23). So questions arise. Does God choose as He pleases? Does His choice depend on advanced awareness? – for Augustine, suggests Erickson "for God by an unalterable decree has determined who is to be saved; being totally of God's grace, salvation in no way depends on humans or what they do..."²³ Following these comments by Augustine, Erickson looks at differing views of predestination, firstly Calvin. He notes the "acronym TULIP: total depravity, unconditional predestination, limited atonement, irresistible grace and perseverance."²⁴ Erickson notes that total depravity "means that every individual is so sinful as to be unable to respond to any offer of grace."²⁵ He adds that sometimes "the phrase 'total inability' is used, meaning that sinners have lost the ability to do good and are

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid., 923

²³ Ibid., 924

²⁴ Ibid., 928

²⁵ Ibid.

unable to convert themselves.”²⁶ Commenting on the sovereignty of God and His freedom to do what He wills, unconditional predestination is seen in the parable of the labourers in the field (Mt 20:13f), thus election clearly is God’s choice of certain people for His special favour. This author focuses and is comforted by the marvellous references quoted on more than one occasion (Eph 1:4-5; Jn 6:44). Further commenting on God’s actions, Erickson notes the choice of the nation of Israel and comments “in Romans 9 Paul argues impressively that all of these choices are totally of God and in no way depend on the people chosen.”²⁷ Quoted is Romans 9:15-16. Erickson also notes as does this author that election is “efficacious”²⁸, in that those whom God chooses “will most certainly come to faith in Him and, for that matter, will persevere in that faith to the end.”²⁹ Further, “election is from all eternity and out of God’s infinite mercy....”³⁰ Erickson also comments on free will, noting that “Calvinists insist that election is not inconsistent with free will, that is, as they understand the term. They deny, however,

²⁶ Ibid. This author notes Erickson’s choice of word “convert” here. In accordance with this author’s discussion and with reference to Chapters 1 and 2 above Erickson should be using the term “regenerate”, as conversion is the response of the elect after God’s initiative of regeneration.

²⁷ Ibid., 930

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

that humans have free will in the Arminian sense. Sin has removed, if not freedom, at least the ability to exercise freedom properly.”³¹ Concerning the question of free will this author suggests that humankind always had a real will before and after the Fall. This author agrees that before the Fall Adam and Eve had freedom of will which was marred by the Fall as Erickson has stated. There was a problem to “exercise freedom properly.”³² This author also adds that before conversion³³ people have real will but after conversion believers have free will:

A This author, disagreeing³⁴ with Grudem, would place the element of conversion³⁵ before regeneration. This author

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ This author observes in expanding these thoughts that after conversion which is a response to regeneration the elect person grows in the knowledge of the faith given (Titus 1:1f). Each person will be guided by the Holy Spirit to know that each is free and each will joyfully be free to worship Jesus and be obedient to Him each breath He gives (Jn 8:32,36)

³⁴ This author is disagreeing with Grudem’s comments focuses firstly on the truth that faith is not the work of man but rather given as a gift from God (Eph 2:5-8). Jesus is the faithful One who gives faith on regeneration (Rom 3:22, 26). This faithfulness of Jesus gives strength to each elect to “keep on believing – keep on trusting.” This is the work of Jesus the Son of God. Obedience is the work of man and is part of the process of conversion which is man’s response (Jn 14:15; 15:9, 10). This is emphasised below.

³⁵ The aim of the previous dissertation was to confirm that all the wisdom of the elect was in Jesus. In order to examine this truth this author needed to examine several key areas of doctrine – namely the sovereignty of God. In the original dissertation discussion could not examine the whole Council of God. Thus during the analysis this author had no intention to discuss Erickson’s logical order but rather acknowledge Erickson’s work when examining God’s sovereignty when calling and drawing the elect. This author has observed that there is confusion among authors when examining their subject in the definition of the word “conversion.” This can be seen when studying the Book of Acts, especially Chapter 9 dealing with the conversion of Paul which should commence initially not the conversion of Paul but the regeneration of Paul after he had the vision of Jesus on the Road to Damascus.

notes that Grudem's comment "repentance and faith is the work of man"³⁶ is in conflict with a previous quote Schreiner made concerning a person before regeneration "that they have no moral ability to believe, and the only way they will believe is if they are given by the Father to the Son...."³⁷ This author does view repentance in a sense of obedience to Jesus as noted later. This author is also reminded of a truth, for example, that this author decided to believe in Jesus ... and chose to follow Jesus – then after regeneration realised through the Holy Spirit's anointing that in eternity past Jesus decided for this author ... and Jesus chose this author (Eph 1:4; Jn 6:37, 44, 65; 10:29). These references are discussed and printed. This author agrees with Grudem's comment that conversion "includes repentance from sin and a faith in Christ,"³⁸ but this author would go one step further in that argument by saying that the new believer is growing in faith, a faith which has not really reached the point of regeneration which is instantaneous. Thus the element of conversion comes before regeneration.³⁹ Having said this, this author

³⁶ Wayne Grudem, "Perseverance of the Saints: A Case Study from the Warning Passages in Hebrews," in Still Sovereign eds. Thomas R Schreiner, Bruce A Ware (Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 2000), p 135

³⁷ Thomas R Schreiner, "Does Scripture Teach Prevenient Grace in the Wesleyan Sense?" in Still Sovereign eds. Thomas R Schreiner, Bruce A Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), p 243

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Further to the footnote above this author further comments on this discussion of order, that regeneration has to come before conversion as the elect person has to be born before he or she can breath – born again, born from above and thus evidently before he or she grows. Much depends here on whether the reader has a Calvinist or Arminian view.

also agrees with Schreiner when he comments on Grudem “however, most evangelicals, including this author, understand repentance from sin to be an essential part of true conversion and argue that no-one can genuinely trust Christ as a Saviour from his or her sins unless the person has repented of those sins.⁴⁰ Therefore, although justification is by faith alone, faith is always accompanied by repentance, and always results in a changed pattern of life. The Westminster Confession of Faith aptly says:

“Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is alone the instrument of justification: yet is it not alone in the person justified, but ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love (11:2).”⁴¹

A further comment needs to be made on Grudem’s statement that conversion: “item two (repentance and faith) is entirely the work of man.”⁴² Schreiner, in his footnotes about this comment that “although many would argue that God enables

⁴⁰ God’s sovereign regeneration including calling and drawing also includes conviction of the elect to repent and thus initiating the process of conversion, the process of knowing and growing.

⁴¹ Thomas R Schreiner, Bruce A Ware, eds Still Sovereign. (Grand Rapids, Mich, Baker Books, 2000), p 135

⁴² Wayne Grudem, “Perseverance of the Saints: A Case Study from the Warning Passages in Hebrews.” In Still Sovereign. eds Thomas R Schreiner, Bruce A Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), p 135

us to repent and believe, all would agree that we repent and we believe; God does not repent and believe for us.”⁴³ This author agrees with Schreiner’s footnote, that we have a responsibility, but suggests that further comment is needed, for Ephesians 2:8 says “for it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is a gift from God.” In a sense Schreiner, in his footnote, is correct when dealing with the statement repentance and faith is a compound conditional statement. However, the reality is that God, through grace, gives us the gift of faith and no human effort can contribute to our salvation – it is God’s gift: however repentance, as this author suggests, is something we do, in the sense of obedience, but it also involves a component of God’s enabling, part of the “good works which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph 2:10).⁴⁴

⁴³ Thomas R Schreiner, Bruce A Ware, eds Still Sovereign. (Grand Rapids, Mich, Baker Books, 2000), p 136

⁴⁴ This author still finds these truths of repentance and faith difficult to bend the finite mind around. Regeneration has to come first as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 above. Regeneration comes first as God’s initiative and work and it is instantaneous to the newly born-again member of God’s elect. This powerful, awesome mind renewing reality is a marvellous surprise. At this point each person knows nothing of the truths of God – their knowing and growing has just begun. The process of conversion which is now their response, begins along with their walk in obedience. And what a walk it is! A walk from sin and unrighteousness (Rom 3:10-12) to life and righteousness after regeneration, in Jesus. After regeneration we are still imperfect and will sin. This author is not advocating a doctrine of sinless perfection. However, it is important to also emphasise here the truth of Romans 6:1-18:

1. What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 2. By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? 3. Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4. We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we doo may life a new life. 5. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. 6. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – 7. Because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. 8. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9. For we know

Concerning Erickson's analysis on God's teaching of adoption, Tenney adds a contrast between the old and the new covenant, "the Old Covenant involved a revelation of the holiness of God in a righteous standard of law which those who reached it were solemnly enjoined to keep. The New Covenant embodies a revelation of the holiness of God in an utterly righteous Son, who empowers those who received the revelation to become sons of God by making them righteous (Jn 1:12)."⁴⁵ Tenney adds that "John defines the belief in Christ as receiving Him."⁴⁶ This author sees this as confirming the believer's adoption. An additional point made by Tenney to be stated that Jesus was the Son of God by nature; the

that since Christ was raised from the dead he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. 10. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. 11. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. 13. Do not offer parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. 14. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. 15. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! 16. Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17. But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. 18. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness."

This passage is critical to the newly elect's walk in obedience. This author thus highlights verse 2 above that "we died to sin – how can we live in it any longer?" This emphasises that the newly elect person can be free from sin – he or she really does not have to sin anymore! Each has a faith relationship with Jesus. As a result of this union each can call on the Holy Spirit to give guidance and strength not to allow sin to entangle. Further in verse 6 as a result of the new life (v 4) the old self has been "done away with" and each does not have to sin – does not have to be led into temptation. Finally as verse 18 teaches each has "been set free from sin" and leads a righteous and obedient life – being declared righteous by Jesus. However, Jesus is the only One who has not sinned, did not sin, and never will sin. He only is perfection. Because the Christian has the Spirit of God within, any disobedient action will bring about conviction and hence repentance. It is the unbeliever who will not experience this conviction (John 16:7 ff).

⁴⁵ Merrill C Tenney, New Testament Survey. (Grand Rapids, Mich, Eerdmans, 1983), p 124

⁴⁶ Ibid. 190

disciples could become sons of God only by receiving Christ. This author notes this by comparing Tenney's comments in John 1:12. This author considers this a great comfort especially when considering what Paul says in Colossians 1:20f that "through the blood of His cross they are reconciled to God."⁴⁷ This author sees this as our great hope of glory.

This author also notes Young's comment on righteousness that it has all to do with God and nothing to do with man concerning salvation – "salvation is by grace, that is, it is of God and not of man."⁴⁸

This author notes a clear parallel discussed by Young reflecting the word of Jesus in Mark 1:15 about "repent" – which this author views as "turn around". Young emphasises "turn, O backsliding children ..." (Jer 3:14)

This author is encouraged by comments by Young concerning the relationship between faithfulness and righteousness, obedience and wisdom. This is clear in Young's following

⁴⁷ Ibid. 322

⁴⁸ Edward J Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*. (London: The Tyndale Press, 1966), p 211

explanation. God is going to use a less righteous people to punish Judah who are more righteous, yet unfaithful and disobedient (Hab 1:13). Young then discusses the need of Messianic work and he suggests “This Messianic work is described in both negative and positive terms; negative – restraining the transgression, completing sin, and covering iniquity; positive – bringing in everlasting righteousness, sealing vision and prophecy ...”⁴⁹ This author sees this as a clear reference to the 400 silent years before Jesus who is seen yet concealed in the Old Covenant is to come into His world.

This author reflects on the work of Grudem who also comments on the relationship of faithfulness and righteousness, obedience and wisdom. Grudem adds “When we as God’s people walk in His ways, we come to know more and more fully by experience that the Kingdom of God is indeed ‘righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’ (Rom 14:17).⁵⁰ Grudem has made a wonderful comment here, as he has emphasised walking in God’s ways and in actually walking⁵¹ - experiencing the Kingdom – the rule of Jesus in

⁴⁹ Ibid. 375

⁵⁰ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*. (Leicester: IVP, 1994), p 203

⁵¹ This emphasises and reinforces the truth of Footnote 57 above

the heart of a faithful and obedient servant. The reference to Romans 14:17 is important. This author goes one step further by mentioning 14:18 which focuses on the peace and joy from service and the reality that Jesus and others are pleased – “...because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.” (Rom 14:18)

Scripture

In this key area of the sovereignty of God this author now focuses on the subject of Scripture⁵² and is thankful for the contributions of other authors. Apart from Scripture, which is God’s special revelation, this author makes some important comments about general revelation later below. Yarbrough in Schreiner explains the importance of Scripture in divine sovereignty still discussing election, commenting on the Gospel of John that it “lays great stress on divine initiative in

⁵² From this author’s ministry it is clear that scholarly and non-scholarly liberals have a completely different view on the authority of Scripture as compared to Bible believing Christians. This author refers again to the section “Unbelieving Liberals Misconceptions” in Chapter 4 below. It is important to emphasise the danger of liberal error. This author was at a Ministry School where the question of homosexuality was discussed. This author mentioned the truths in Scripture (Rom 1:27; 1 Cor 6:9) but the response from liberal clergy was that the Letters of Paul, Peter and John were not Scripture. This author then mentioned the truths of Sodom and Gomorrah as one of my colleagues said that only the Old Testament was actually Scripture. On making this statement the reply to me was – “move with the times.” It is clear to this author that liberals do not accept the authority of Scripture. This was further proven when the Gospels were not referred to as truth but as story. Hence the need in this footnote to emphasise God’s sovereignty and authority as recorded in Scripture.

salvation.”⁵³ He goes further to ask the question about what is the role and importance of human faith? Yarbrough cites Osbourne who “argues that in John’s Gospel ‘sovereignty and responsibility exist side by side.’ He suggests that divine election works ‘with one’s faith decision.’ Election does not produce faith ...”⁵⁴ Yarbrough explains that Osbourne’s understanding of John’s gospel is inadequate and controversial. However, divine sovereignty is stressed in human faith and that “John’s Gospel explicitly centres more on the sovereignty of God.”⁵⁵ Osbourne cites John 3:1-15, 5:21, 6:35-40, 15:16-9, and Chapters 9, 10, 17. In his conclusion, Yarbrough comments how complex the doctrine of divine election, foreknowledge and predestination are and encourages Christians to question not feud and to “cling to the sole sufficiency of grace in Christ.”⁵⁶ And he again notes Osbourne’s “recourse to the paradoxical coexistence of sovereign grace and human choice [that] at least attempts to leave God free to do His sovereign bidding.”⁵⁷

Further concerning Scripture, Westblade gives more in-depth analysis to the sovereignty of God in his discussion on divine

⁵³ Robert W Yarbrough, “Divine Election in the Gospel of John.” In Still Sovereign eds. Thomas R Schreiner, Bruce A Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), p 56

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Ibid, 57

⁵⁶ Ibid, 61

⁵⁷ Ibid

election in the Pauline literature. He notes Paul's "overriding concern to ascribe sovereign glory to God forever by depending on all things from Him, apprehending all things through Him, and attributing all things to Him ..." ⁵⁸ Westblade highlights Paul's acknowledgment of God's sovereignty by citing the Letter to the Ephesians "...electing the saints before the foundation of the world to be fellow heirs with Christ in God's grander purpose...(1:6, 11, 14) ...all things that have been created (1:10) and all things that occur (1:11) accord with the good pleasure (1:5, 9) of God's will a purpose that He set forth beforehand in Christ as a plan." ⁵⁹ This comment from Westblade makes it crystal clear "salvation is a gift of God and depends wholly on God's call (1:18, 2:8)." ⁶⁰ Further he comments on Paul's letter to the Romans that "without God we are dead (2:1, 5)." ⁶¹ He adds "moral corpses that we are, the only hope we have for a will that turns its passion toward God lies in the call of God ...clear evidence of Paul's own confidence in the sovereignty of God over the human heart and well may be found in the manner in which he prays." ⁶² Westblade highlights references to Paul's prayers, for

⁵⁸ Donald J Westblade, "Divine Election in the Pauline Literature." In Still Sovereign eds Thomas R Schreiner, Bruce A Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), p72

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² Ibid, 73

example Philippians 1:9, 1 Thessalonians 3:12 and 2 Thessalonians 2:16, 3:16. Thus Westblade highlights Paul's defence of God's sovereignty in two ways; that God always receives glory for what He does including His choices, and secondly those chosen or elected should always recognise the unshakability "of their security in the unwavering resolve of God Himself to be glorified for His faithfulness to His own purposes."⁶³

This author includes here some comments by Packer which show God's omnipotence – that everything – even our election is part of His plan. Packer in Schreiner also adds to the discussion of the sovereignty of God and begins with love – the love word 'agape' and defines it "in terms of the love shown forth in Christ ... love of a kind the world never dreamed of before."⁶⁴ God sending His Son fits into the Biblical witness of the whole sovereignty of God and Packer discusses God's being – His communicable and incommunicable attributes. This is important here as Packer notes that in the former "in our sanctification they begin to be reproduced in us ... as wisdom, truth, goodness, ... holiness and righteousness... the

⁶³ Ibid, 75

⁶⁴ J I Packer, "The Love of God: Universal and Particular." In Still Sovereign eds Thomas R Schreiner, Bruce A Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), p 279

latter, commonly listed as self-existence ... immutability, infinity, eternity and simplicity (meaning inner integration).”⁶⁵ Packer goes even further in analysing the sovereignty of God by explaining the trinity of the divine Lord ... and the unity of the divine character who is “unchangeably wise, just, pure, good and true.”⁶⁶

Commenting on God’s sovereignty Ortlund quotes Jeremiah 20:7-9 concerning “His word is in my heart like a fire shut up in my bones ...” and Ortlund notes that Jeremiah’s confession “sober both Calvinists and the Arminian, lest we trivialise the doctrine of God’s sovereignty as a mere debating point.”⁶⁷ This author comments that this is not an insignificant point made here, as sometimes for the right reason trying to compartmentalise thoughts into our finite minds we can actually lose track of the significance of the sovereignty of God.⁶⁸ After all, these efforts are to grow more in the

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 280

⁶⁷ Raymond C Ortlund, Jr, “The Sovereignty of God: Case Studies in the Old Testament.” In Still Sovereign eds. Thomas R Schreiner, Bruce A Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), p 39

⁶⁸ Correct doctrine keeps us on track in our true understanding of the sovereignty of God. This author is taking a Calvinist view, and acknowledges that an Arminian view would favour Erickson’s order. As Christian our minds are in Christ (1 Cor 2:16). We must never leave the main focus of the sovereignty of God when trying to explain doctrine such as Erickson’s logical order. The finiteness of man leads to an incomplete understanding of God’s infinite plan for His creation. This leads to confusion of terms used to describe the processes God has put in place. Here the terms are ‘conversion’ and ‘regeneration’. God is our all, our being – indeed our every breath we take; the author of our regeneration and thus the giver of our faith.

knowledge of Him, with the main purpose to actually do those works which he has “prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph 2:10).

Further this author is encouraged by Ortlund’s reference (Jer 20:7-9) concerning “...His word”. This author is reminded here of Jesus the eternal Living Word, the Great “I AM”, the absolute Truth (Jn 14:6). Jesus is the Truth spoken by the sovereign God – indeed the second Person, the sovereign Son who declares God’s promises.

Effectual Call

Ware discusses effectual calling and grace, which this author views as one of the most marvellous doctrines demonstrating the sovereignty of God and of the Son. His comments add to Erickson where Erickson discusses the logical order – effectual call, conversion and regeneration.⁶⁹ Ware explains that the doctrine “refers more specifically to God’s inward and

⁶⁹ Millard J Erickson, *Christian Theology*. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 1998), p 941ff. It is this logical order which is the subject of this author’s revision is defined in Chapters 1 and 2 above, which was not fully explained and resulted in this discussion due to insufficient definition of terms. This author reviews Scripture to suggest the order regeneration and conversion where regeneration and effectual call are linked elements of the grace of Jesus which occur simultaneously and instantaneously. This comment is qualified by the reality of Scripture already mentioned (Rom 3:10-12), in that the newly regenerated person then begins to know and grow.

ultimately persuasive summons to repent of sin and turn to Christ for salvation.”⁷⁰ This author is humbled by this great comfort, yet sorrowful because of the fact that not all are given the call and are saved.

Clowney expands on these ideas on effectual call in his comments on preaching and the sovereignty of God, when he discusses the call of Saul, now Paul, who “came as a servant of the Lord preaching the Good News of God’s salvation (Acts 13:47).”⁷¹ The sovereignty of God is clearly demonstrated in Paul proclaiming and preaching the salvation of God’s calling and only through God’s power. This author’s sorrow, mentioned above, is compared to the great sorrow of Paul when he himself express the grief of the Jews’ rejection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Clowney notes a very important point concerning God’s sovereignty that “God’s word did not fail, for His purposes stand in those whom He has chosen ... God chose Isaac not Ishmael; Jacob not Esau ...”⁷²

⁷⁰ Bruce A Ware, “Effectual Calling and Grace” in Still Sovereign eds. Thomas R Schreiner, Bruce A Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), p 211

⁷¹ Edmund P Clowney, “Preaching and the Sovereignty of God” in Still Sovereign eds Thomas R Schreiner, Bruce A Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), p 335

⁷² Ibid.

Further on election – Gospel of John, Yarbrough in Schreiner comments on divine election in the Gospel of John beginning with an interesting point that election is “implicit in John’s opening words, ‘in the beginning ...’ (1:1), a clear echo of Genesis 1:1.”⁷³ Creation and redemption are spoken of here and explained clearly that “God is, and that He willed to create and to save ... God chose to send the light, not because but in spite of human desire and readiness for it.”⁷⁴

Whilst commenting on divine election in the Gospel of John, Yarbrough in Schreiner also comments on creation. He explains “creation, and accordingly also redemption, can have no other explanation than that God is, and that He willed to create and to save.”⁷⁵

Commenting further on Erickson’s discussion on predestination and election, Tenney links the key idea of the sovereignty of God with the comments on predestination and election, explaining that the “sovereign purpose of God in establishing the church permeates the first half of the

⁷³ Robert W Yarbrough, “Divine Election in the Gospel of John” in Still Sovereign eds Thomas R Schreiner, Bruce A Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), p 48

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Epistle.”⁷⁶ He is referring to Paul’s letter to the Ephesians (Eph 1:4, 5) where he notes “throughout the epistles runs the one theme of the church. The epistle was not directed to novices in the Christian faith, but to those who having achieved some maturity in spiritual experience wished to go on to fuller knowledge and life.”⁷⁷

Touching on predestination and election, in his discussion “Against the Pelagians” in his Chapter on Augustine⁷⁸ Placher interestingly notes “out of such reflections, Augustine forged his doctrine of predestination. Through grace, God saves some people in spite of their inability to help themselves. Nothing they have done merited that salvation. Yet Scripture insists that God’s grace does not extend to all. There are goats as well as sheep; some are consigned to eternal fire. God must simply therefore decide to save some and to leave others, no worse in their characters to the consequences of their sins. Is that unfair? Augustine argued that everyone sins, everyone deserves punishment. God gives some better than they deserve, but no one gets less. The whole theory may

⁷⁶ Merrill C Tenney, New Testament Survey (Grand Rapids, Mich, Eerdmans, 1983), p 318

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Again, see the section “Unbelieving Liberal Misconceptions”, as many liberals are Universalists not believing in the doctrine of election.

make God seem arbitrary but at least it keeps people from being proud. No one can claim to have earned salvation; it is an undeserved gift for which one can only be grateful. The justice of God's predestination depends on the claim that everyone is a sinner deserving punishment..."⁷⁹

Further concerning predestination and election, Placher makes an important point concerning this doctrine in the early history of Christian theology as he discusses Gottschalk's comments (800) who argued these points with Hincmar "Gottschalk had said that God predestinates some people to damnation. Hincmar protested that God would never do that. He said that God predestinates the elect to salvation, but does not predestinate the condemned. Gottschalk thought this was simply silly: predestinating one group inevitably implied predestinating of the other ...on another issue, Gottschalk argued that people could do good only with grace..."⁸⁰ Then the argument centred around good "deeds" of non-Christians. However, what this author notes as interesting are comments made by Eriugena who "agreed with Hincmar, but for a reason distinctly his own: since sin and evil do not exist they cannot

⁷⁹ William C Placher, *A History of Christian Theology*. (Philadelphia, Penn: Westminster Pres, 1983), p 115, 116

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 127

be predestinated by God.”⁸¹ What further amazed this author is how Hincmar could have accepted Eriugena’s argument which stands so dramatically outside the truth of Scripture (Rom 3:10-12, 23; 6:1-18; 1 Pet 3:18; Rom 5:8 and 2 Cor 5:21). This author reasons that this is an important point since the Canon of New Testament Scripture was established since c 200.

⁸¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

DEITY OF CHRIST

This author needed to discuss the important key areas and doctrine of the preceding chapter “Sovereignty of God” to support the truth of the deity of Jesus and the fact that for eternity He is the believers’ righteousness and wisdom (cf again Lk 24:27 and associated Old Testament references as listed). This author begins the discussion on the deity of Jesus by looking at comments by Griffith Thomas concerning the atoning sacrifice of Jesus and His righteousness which is imputed to the believer. Griffith Thomas states “It is not enough that our Lord’s death occurred in history; it must also become part of our personal experience, in order that it may be a spiritual force in our life.”⁸² He goes on to explain Article 11 in the Book of Common Prayer – “We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our own works ...”⁸³ Commenting on Article 11 Griffith Thomas suggest that it is the compliment of Article 2 – “The Son which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very

⁸² W H Griffith Thomas, The Catholic Faith. (London: Church Book Room Press Ltd, 1966), p 54

⁸³ Ibid, 55

and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father, took man's nature...."⁸⁴ This author observes⁸⁵ from Griffith

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ This author adds to this observation. The phrase above "...imputed to the believer..." is wonderful for the analysis required for the original dissertation. For the review of Erickson's logical order, this author needs to highlight this following truth. On regeneration the new believer knows almost nothing of the truths of faith God has just given but knows he/she has been born again – born anew – born from above (Jn 3:7). Being filled with the Holy Spirit and knowing this glorious anointing (1 Jn 2:20ff) this imputation is amazing. On regeneration, on being saved, salvation is not lost (Lk 19:10; Heb 13:5). Each new believer now begins to know and grow in obedience. Of course there is a warning in relation to sin as already noted above (Rom 6:1-18). This warning is highlighted in the following passage.

1. Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, 2. instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. 3. And God permitting, we will do so. 4. It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5. who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, 6. if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace. 7. Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. 8. But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned. 9. Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case – things that accompany salvation. 10. God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. 11. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. 12. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised. 13. When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, 14. saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants." 15. And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised. 16. Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. 17. Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. 18. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. 19. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, 20. where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 6)

This author has emphasised that after regeneration the new believer will want to know and grow. Thus you will note that the passage starts with the word "therefore" which refers back to a previous warning about falling away. This author asks the question, "Can a Christian fall away?" In the passage quoted the writer suggests that we "leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go onto maturity." The passage raises the question about falling from grace or losing salvation. This author suggests that the passage does not teach that one of the elect can ever lose salvation as suggested in verses 4-6. This author suggests that this is a "hypothetical argument" which warns Christians from a Jewish background that being born in the Spirit will result in encouragement from the Holy Spirit to want to know more about Jesus and to grow to maturity in Him. This author also suggests these verses are a warning against backsliding. This author does not consider that this passage is suggesting that the believer can "lose their salvation" for the truth is that this cannot happen. What can be the case is that the person had never been regenerated in the first place. This author has included the whole passage (Heb 6) to emphasise that even though this Scripture "speaks like this" (v9) there is confidence that God is at work in their hearts and that they are regenerated and that these words in Scripture here are a great encouragement to those who are regenerated but who need emphasis by God of His promises and that they need to constantly look to Him whilst waiting patiently

Thomas' comments the valuable truth that Jesus is the eternal second Person, the Son from everlasting, the eternal Living Word (Jn 1:1). Concerning the fact of Christ's deity, this author is reminded of how all God's righteousness and wisdom dwells in His Son – the sovereign Lord Jesus. Several thoughts from the key area Sovereignty of God are therefore re-emphasised in the context of the truth of the Deity of Jesus. The truths of Scripture need to be printed here for encouragement.

“Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but for those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God...it is because of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.” (1 Cor 1:22-24, 30).

for His continual blessings. If there is any doubt on the part of the believer, this should not be seen as a sign that the believer is not a regenerated person. Doubt should send the believer back to God's word in order to reconcile any differences or address any doubts. For example, if prayer is unanswered, a believer would not turn their back on God and His promises, but would go back to God's word to confirm that God's ways are far better than ours (cf Jn 6:39-40; 10:27-30; Phil 1:9-10; 3:12-17). This author includes the whole of Hebrews 6 passage for context purposes. It is dangerous in some cases to take a verse of Scripture by itself to prove a particular point.

There is also Jesus' truth about His salvation—rest and that believers can find comfort through faith in Him.

Jesus said: “All things have been committed to me by my Father. No-one knows the Son except the Father, and no-one knows the Son except the Father, and no-one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him. ‘Come to me, all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest...’” (Mt 11:27, 28).

We can completely trust Jesus for He also said: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” (Mt 28:18)

This is a very important point for it confirms the truth of Jesus' authority as the apostle John explains:

“The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in His hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.” (Jn 3:35-36)

This is also supported by the following truths about the authority of Jesus and His election of those chosen before the foundation of the world as explained in the references (Jn 5:24; 6:37, 44, 65; 10:12; 17:1-8, 24-26; Eph 1:4-5).

This reality is clearly seen in the Old Testament record when God speaks to Moses out of the burning bush, and Moses asks about God's name, and God says to Moses:

“I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” (Ex 3:14)

Clearly it was Jesus speaking out of the burning bush as God, the Living Word, who was in the Old Testament concealed, who is in the New Testament revealed and who is to come. Jesus is the eternal second Person of YAHWEH. In John 6:35; 8:12; 10:7; 10:11; 11:25; 14:6 and 15:1, Jesus as God, in His glorious deity, speaks again as God using His name “I AM.” Jesus' deity is also seen with references firstly to John 4:26:

“Then Jesus declared ‘I who speak to you am He.’”

This author comments on the words 'am He' with the truth that in Greek Jesus is actually saying "I am....I am God" which reflects His Name (Ex 3:14), and His revelation of Himself as the eternal Lord in reality in His Old Covenant.

This is an eternal truth to His deity even before He came into His world. Secondly this is further confirmed by the apostle John – John 8:58:

Jesus said: "I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am!"

Erickson importantly comments and notes "that rather than saying, 'I was,' He says, 'I am.' Erickson notes that Leon Morris suggests there is an implied contrast here between 'a mode of being which has a definite beginning' ... 'one of which is eternal'. It is also quite possible that Jesus is alluding to the 'I AM formula' which the LORD identified Himself in Exodus 3:14-15.⁸⁶ Further, Tenney adds to Erickson with a very succinct comment concerning the deity of

⁸⁶ Millard J Erickson, Christian Theology. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), p 702

Christ, providing ample references explaining that before His enemies He used language that predicted both pre-existence and deity (Jn 8:42, 58; 10:30-33, 36; Mt 22:41-45). Also concerning Erickson's discussion on the deity of Christ, Tenney notes that in Christ God is perfectly pictured (Col 1:15), and "that in Him all the fullness of deity resides (1:19), and that in Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (2:3)."⁸⁷ This author includes again here for the purpose of context comments made earlier by Milne about the deity of Jesus. Concerning the deity of Christ, the Lordship of Jesus, Milne explains that we need no longer "wait further revelation which might supersede His self-disclosure in Jesus Christ. As the eternal Son of God, the reality of the eternal God Himself, Jesus is the ultimate revelation, the truth in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Jn 14:6; Col 2:3)."⁸⁸

Wisdom of God's Choosing in Christ

⁸⁷ Merrill C Tenney, New Testament Survey. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), p 323

⁸⁸ Bruce Milne, Know the Truth. (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982), p 67

Concerning the wisdom of Christ and being mindful of His divinity, one area this author is very interested in, is the authority given to Jesus by the Father concerning the truth again in John 10:29:

“My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch out of my Father’s hand.”

Jesus follows this with the wonderful truth, “I and the Father are one” (Jn 10:30).

Does God choose as He pleases? Does His choice depend on advanced awareness? For Augustine, suggests Erickson, “for God by an unalterable decree has determined who is to be saved; being totally of God’s grace, salvation in no way depends on humans or what they do...”⁸⁹

Following these comments by Augustine, Erickson looks at differing views of predestination, firstly Calvin. He notes the “acronym TULIP: total depravity, unconditional predestination,

⁸⁹ Millard J Erickson, Christian Theology. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), p 924

limited atonement, irresistible grace and perseverance.”⁹⁰ This author has touched on these truths already, however the focus and context now concerns Jesus and His deity as God – the Son of God. Erickson notes that total depravity “means that every individual is so sinful as to be unable to respond to any offer of grace.”⁹¹ This author sees this in many instances where Jesus speaks to the Pharisees. He adds that sometimes “the phrase ‘total inability’ is used, meaning that sinners have lost the ability to do good and are unable to convert themselves.”⁹²

This is why this author has already acknowledged Romans 3:10-12 and Jesus’ words:

“The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”
(Lk 19:10).

Thus here this author observes and sees the need to look to Jesus completely in the right action or behaviour with the aim of being successful for eternity through faith in Jesus – being declared righteous, and the comfort only He gives, mindful that even our faith

⁹⁰ Ibid, 928

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid. This author adds the last two words “convert themselves” should actually be “regenerate themselves” as conversion is the process of growth and knowledge as the elect’s response.

is His gift (Eph 2:5-8). Jesus is Saviour and has God's full authority. Further commenting on God's actions, Erickson notes the choice of the nation of Israel and comments "in Romans 9 Paul argues impressively that all of these choices are totally of God and in no way depend on the people chosen."⁹³ Romans 9:15-16 is cited here. Erickson also notes that election is "Efficacious",⁹⁴ in that those whom God chooses⁹⁵ will most certainly come to faith in Jesus and, for that matter, will persevere in that faith to the end."⁹⁶ Erickson explains that we confidently understand God's plan will be fulfilled and that the "elect will come to faith,"⁹⁷ also understanding that we must not criticise ourselves when in our witness some do not come to faith in Jesus for that occurred in His ministry also (Jn 6:37, 44), and we should be encouraged in our witness and evangelism as we do not know who is the elect and we must understand and acknowledge that it is all by grace – God's unmerited favour through the authority given through Jesus. What a comfort this is and an encouragement to press on towards the

⁹³ Ibid, 930

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Erickson comments here that election is efficacious and the elect will certainly come to faith in Jesus and will persevere to the end could be more accurately stated. This author has already revisited and discussed the sovereignty of God. What this author is emphasising here is that Erickson's comments in this context limit the sovereignty of God. This author asks the question, who is doing the "coming to faith"? Who is doing the "persevering to the end"? This author emphasises here that God gives the faith in Jesus, through the grace of Jesus (Rom 3:22, 26); where the Greek teaches faith "of" Jesus (Eph 2:5-8), and God preserves His elect (Heb 13:5).

⁹⁶ Millard J Erickson, *Christian Theology*. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 1998), p 930

⁹⁷ Ibid, 940

goal God has given to believers – to be successful, that is to be faithful to Jesus.

Commenting on the above – the Grace of Jesus, and Jesus’ requirement also for our obedience, Carson in his reflections on assurance makes an interesting comment about election that as an “element in the Biblical portrayal of God’s sovereignty never functions so as to destroy human responsibility...”⁹⁸ This author adds that here “sovereignty” points directly to the deity of Jesus. This is a very important truth. Jesus taught the wisdom of this truth the day before Good Friday.

“Jesus said: ‘I am the Way the Truth and the Life.

Jesus said: “If you love me you will obey what I command.”
(Jn14:15)

Jesus then explained that he had authority to say these words
– authority

⁹⁸ D A Carson, “Reflections on Assurance” Still Sovereign, eds Thomas R Schreiner, Bruce A Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), p 272

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in His love.” (Jn 15:9-10)

Given by God the Father to God the Son

It’s wonderful to focus again on the truth of the selfless love of Jesus – His dedication to “save His people from their sins” (Mt 1:21) – His obligatory love, His mission and duty in obedience to His Father to complete the Father’s purposes – the redemption of the elect. Also commenting on the point above, Schreiner explains that God – YAHWEH (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) – is completely sovereign and “yet human choices and responsibility are not a charade. God ordains all that comes to pass and is good; and yet evil exists, and it is really evil. God chooses only some to be saved, and yet there is also the true sense in which He desires the salvation of all. Those who are elect will never lose their salvation, and yet those who do not persevere to the end will not inherit the Kingdom of God.”⁹⁹ The above statement is of a human mind – a Christian brother or sister with the mind of Christ. However, none

⁹⁹ Thomas R Schreiner, Bruce A Ware, eds Still Sovereign. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), p 19

can judge, and this author thus focuses on the truth of the parable of the sower and the wheat and the tares here.

Westblade in Schreiner comments on ability in his discussion on divine election. He notes “God Himself gives and withholds the ability to trust. God, not the sinner, should therefore be held responsible.”¹⁰⁰ This highlights how difficult this theological truth is to our finite minds as Westblade continues “that God gives, an ability to trust to have a will that is favourably disposed, is a moral ability, one that we commonly distinguish in practice from our natural or physical abilities.”¹⁰¹ Schreiner expands this comment by his comment on prevenient grace where he distinguishes between moral and physical ability. He notes that “God gives commands to unbelievers that they can physically obey; that is, they could observe His commandments if they desired to do so. Unbelievers are morally unable to keep God’s commands in the sense that they have no desire to obey all of His commandments.”¹⁰² Thus he explains prevenient grace that before they repent as the scriptures teach “that they have no moral ability to believe, and the only way they will believe is if they are given by the Father to the Son. This

¹⁰⁰ Donald Westblade, “Divine Election in the Pauline Literature.” Still Sovereign eds. Thomas R Schreiner, Bruce A Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), p 79

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Thomas R Schreiner, “Does Scripture Teach Prevenient Grace in the Wesleyan Sense?” in Still Sovereign eds. Thomas R Schreiner, Bruce A Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), p 243

revelation is not vouchsafed to all people but only to the elect.”¹⁰³ He takes this thought one step further by commenting on Scripture where Jesus commands believers “to be perfect (Mt 5:48), but the need for forgiveness (Mt 6:14-15) demonstrates that perfection is impossible to attain.”¹⁰⁴ This author notes as Schreiner discusses that it is difficult for humankind to accept their responsibility for sin irrespective of the truth that “they are born with an inclination and that will inevitably lead them to sin.”¹⁰⁵ The reality discussed by Schreiner that it is “the kindness of God”¹⁰⁶ that should give people understanding and leading to repentance. As Schreiner had already stated that Adam was still responsible for their “failure to respond to God’s grace.”¹⁰⁷ These are awesome thoughts as we stand in awe of the righteousness and wisdom of Jesus in the care of our loving and merciful Father who patiently waits for those to change – to turn to Him in repentance and faith answering the call in actions that are successful – wise actions for now and eternity. This author notes here that this discussion seems to override election. This author’s finite mind has great difficulty in the theology of election as, although having the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16), Schreiner seems to be ignoring God’s predestination. This author

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 244

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

reasons that the Holy Spirit through the conviction of those to be regenerated will always be successful through Jesus' irresistible grace. This author cannot judge as stated but can only be a faithful teacher of Scripture to all. This author is not a judge but a fruit inspector. Those who are elect will come to Jesus. Only Jesus knows who the elect are. The elect will respond to the Holy Spirit's, the Spirit of Jesus' effectual calling.¹⁰⁸

“And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (Acts 2:21)

Here Peter is addressing the crowd and referring to Jesus, and the deity of Jesus whom God¹⁰⁹ raised from the dead to pay the price of sin of those who trust Jesus (also Rom 5:8; 6:23; 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pe 3:18). This author notes here Peter is acknowledging Jesus as “Lord” but the reference cited is from the Old Testament as follows:

“And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved. (Joel 2:32)

¹⁰⁸ This author mentions again that the elect will know their calling after regeneration.

¹⁰⁹ This author further clarifies the truth “...God raised ...” that the sovereignty of Jesus is clearly seen here in that the Father gave Jesus authority (Jn 15:9-10) to raise Himself (Jn 10:18)

This author acknowledges that this reference refers to YAHWEH and Peter is actually acknowledging Jesus the “Lord” the eternal second Person of YAHWEH.

Effectual Call – The True Wisdom of God in Jesus

Thus this author views the need to discuss effectual call. In thinking about this amazing subject this author focuses on the most positive mindset possible – that concerning a further analysis of Jesus’ authority.

“The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost” (Lk 19:10)

This is the epitome of God’s wisdom in Jesus.

Ware discusses effectual calling and grace. Here this author emphasises the grace of Jesus:

“John testifies concerning Him. He cries out, saying ‘This was He of whom I said, He who comes after me has surpassed me because He was before me. From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No-one has ever seen God but only God the One and only begotten Son who is at the Father’s side, has made Him known.’” (Jn 1:15-18)

This author views as one of the most marvellous doctrines demonstrating the righteousness and wisdom and sovereignty of God in Jesus. It is Jesus’ righteousness and wisdom – mainly His success to His people in His love. Ware’s comments add to Erickson where Erickson discusses the logical order – effectual call, conversion and regeneration. Ware explains that the doctrine “refers more specifically to God’s inward and ultimately persuasive summons¹¹⁰ to repent of sin and turn to Christ for salvation.”¹¹¹ This author is humbled by this great comfort. Again this author is reminded of the truths:

¹¹⁰ In revisiting Erickson’s logical order discussed here, of course the words “persuasive summons” are relevant. This author acknowledges that they are actively part of the simultaneous regeneration and call of God to the elect person to turn to Jesus in repentance when they know their spiritual rebirth.

¹¹¹ Bruce A Ware, “Effectual Calling and Grace,” in Still Sovereign eds. Thomas R Schreiner, Bruce A Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), p 211

“God presented Him (Jesus) as a sacrifice of atonement (propitiation) through faith in His blood. He did this to demonstrate His justice, because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished – He did it to demonstrate His justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. Where then is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.” (Rom 3:25-28)

This author emphasises here that ‘justify’ refers to the believer being declared righteous by God through faith in Jesus. The reality is that no-one is perfect, good or holy by their own self-righteousness (Rom 3:10-12). This author also focuses on the reality of:

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He

predestined us to be adopted as His sons and daughters through Jesus Christ...in Him we were also chosen having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with His purpose and will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of His glory. And you were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance ...” (Eph 1:3, 4; 11-14)

This author acknowledges that this is a very important truth especially concerning purity where believers are to be “holy and blameless in the Father’s sight” (again Eph 1:4), and this is discussed later when examining the problem of scholarly and non-scholarly liberal error which condones, for example, homosexuality. This author discusses this in the comments on sanctification.

God’s Righteousness and Wisdom Complete in Jesus – Our Adoption

In addition to the truths about adoption discussed in Chapter “Sovereignty of God”, this author also completes these truths by visiting the key area again emphasising the believers’ adoption is complete – indeed completely in Jesus.

Each believer’s salvation in Jesus is real now, yet not complete. This author is encouraged by Wayne Grudem’s wise and interesting thoughts on adoption which he discusses with Schreiner in his contribution – Perseverance of the Saints. Grudem in an interesting way lists “regeneration, justification and adoption”,¹¹² as “entirely works of God”, as part of God’s work and thus part of the righteousness, wisdom and sovereignty of God or more accurately the sovereignty of Jesus, the Son of God. In his comments on perseverance of the saints, Grudem in Schreiner discusses the elements at the beginning of the Christian life, discussing regeneration, conversion, justification, adoption and sanctification. He suggests that regeneration, justification and adoption “are entirely works of God.”¹¹³ However, he suggest that conversion, “which includes repentance from sins and faith in Christ ... is entirely a work of man.”¹¹⁴ This author agrees with

¹¹² Wayne Grudem, “Perseverance of Saints: A Case from the Warning Passages in Hebrews.” In *Still Sovereign* eds. Thomas R Schreiner, Bruce A Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), p 135

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Grudem's comment that conversion "includes repentance from sin and a faith in Christ,"¹¹⁵ but this author would go one step further in that argument by saying that the new believer is growing in faith, a faith which has not really reached¹¹⁶ the point of regeneration – a time of "seeking Jesus" – then if truly chosen then there is regeneration which is instantaneous.

This author makes a point about faith below, discussed also in the section where this author has discussed the truth that God gives faith. Humankind is responsible for being obedient.

Thus God has given the elect faith. Thus this author focuses on the marvellous compound conditional truth concerning the gift of faith given by the grace of Jesus our Saviour who came to save His people:

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is a gift of God – not by works so that no-one can boast." (Eph 2:8-9)

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ This author acknowledges these comments have been touched on before and that in the sovereignty of God and deity of Jesus regeneration has to come first.

There is no way that humankind as a result of the Fall could come to Jesus using their own strength (again Rom 3:10-12). This author also acknowledges the hymn:

“All my hope on God is founded,
All my trust He shall renew;
He, my guide through changing order,
Only good and only true.

God unknown

He alone

Calls my heart to be His own.

Still from man to God eternal
Sacrifice of praise be done,
High above all praised praising
For the gift of Christ His Son.

Hear Christ's call

One and all:

We who follow shall not fall.”¹¹⁷

This author is also reminded that Calvin teaches the truth of unconditional election which supports the above reference and words of the hymn, with the following Scriptures:

“Jesus said ‘All that the father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.’” (Jn 6:37)

“No-one can come to me unless the father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.” (Jn 6:44)

This is why I told you that no-one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.” (Jn 6:65)

“The Jews gathered around Him, saying ‘How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ (Messiah), tell us plainly’. Jesus answered, ‘I did tell you but you did not believe. The miracles I do in my Father’s name speak for me, but you

¹¹⁷ Robert Bridges, in Mission Praise. Hymn number 16

do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; No-one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no-one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the father are one.”(Jn 10:24-30)

“Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad – in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by Him who calls – she was told ‘the older will serve the younger.’ Just as it is written: Jacob I loved but Esau I hated. What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For He says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth. Therefore, God has mercy on who He wants to have mercy, and He hardens whom He wants to harden.” (Rom 9:11-18)

In God's love and care those who are elect are more than conquerors:

“And we know that in all things God works for the good for those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.” (Rom 8:28)

This author adds here on this teaching on election that through the Holy Spirit God's effectual calling results in a positive response for those whom He loves and saves.

With regard to the calling and faith given, the elect are to do those things He has prepared in advance for believers to do (Eph 2:10; also 2 Tim 1:9). Our successful actions completed in Christ through His strength. Walking with Jesus in the now and not yet, waiting for our adoption as sons and daughters to be complete. This is our certain hope – our known hope. As a result of faith and our justification. Our adoption is such a positive state in our relationship with God – its ultimate success – it's the wisdom of God and our “positive standing,”¹¹⁸ as a child of God in His eternity.

¹¹⁸ Millard J Erickson, Christian Theology. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), p 974

A child “restored to a position of favour with God.”¹¹⁹ There is nothing more successful than this.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

Calling and Regeneration

The historic fact of Jesus the Son of God coming into His world to save sinners (Mt 1:21) and the reality of God being with us (Mt 1:23) gives each believer new life with the joy of the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Scripture encourages us in our obedience to God's commands (Is 45:22; Eph 2:4-5). Davis highlights the truth that "the old sinful nature must be changed before man can stand in the presence of God."¹²⁰ (Jn 3:5-7)

Repentance and Faith

God's saving faith gives the believer a new beginning when the believer repents and turns from sin acknowledging Jesus as Lord and accepting His free offer of salvation. Davis notes that firstly John (Mt 3:1-2) preached repentance and Jesus (Mt 4:12, 17) "stressed repentance as an essential prerequisite for entering the Kingdom"¹²¹ and salvation in Him through faith (Gal 2:20). This author adds the important comment in Scripture (Rom 3:25; Heb 9:15) that Jesus redeems those under the first covenant and the

¹²⁰ John Jefferson Davis, *Basic Bible Texts*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1984), p 86

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 89

new covenant, as He is the once and for all time atoning sacrifice (Heb 9:12, 26). This author also says of the kingdom that God's reign was drawing near in the Person and ministry of Jesus (Mt 4:17).

Justification

This author has already made previous context comments about justification in the section "Definitions" and now adds some thoughts by Davis acknowledging Jesus' deity. Davis explains that God pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous and that this is through faith. This author adds that righteousness is God's commitment to do (for those to whom He has given faith) for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Indeed it is the side of His justice that concerns our rescue and acquittal (Rom 4). Davis notes the Scripture (Rom 3:20, 23, 24, 28; 5:1). This author further adds from Davis' listing of Romans 3:23, that whilst we are still sinners, through faith God sees us as justified – "Just-if-I or just-as-if-I" had not sinned (this author's emphasis and comment).

Hunt discusses justification and the word justify, explaining that it means “to declare righteous or to treat as righteous.”¹²² He continues “justify is the verdict of acquittal ...”¹²³

Watson defines justification as “an act of God, God’s free grace whereby He pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ, imputed to us, and received by faith alone.”¹²⁴ Watson highlights that Christ has made us to be righteous through faith (1 Cor 1:30; Rom 5:1). Watson also highlights that “justification is a fixed permanent thing, it can never be lost.”¹²⁵

Sanctification

This author makes some comments on sanctification with the help of Davis which have the background focus on Jesus’ deity, and how Jesus’ deity is compromised by liberal theology. This liberal theology, in this author’s view, is in total opposition to true sanctification. These errors are discussed in this chapter under the sub-heading “Unbelieving Liberal Misconceptions” below. Davis

¹²² T W Hunt, The Mind of Christ. (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1995), p 152

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Thomas Watson, A Body of Divinity. (Edinburgh: the Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), p 226

¹²⁵ Ibid, 229

explains the Christian growth in holiness is to be like Jesus by faith and obedience with the Holy Spirit's guidance through reading the Scriptures. Sanctification is being set apart for Jesus' purpose (Eph 2:10).

Emphasising Jesus our righteousness, Hunt also states that through faith "righteousness has already begun in those who are linked to Christ ... not by any work of theirs, but by the working of the Spirit of God."¹²⁶

Hunt thus makes a clear comment on sanctification that "the justified and regenerated must press on after holiness of life."¹²⁷

Griffith Thomas also comments on sanctification "making righteous – this is sanctification."¹²⁸ Also concerning sanctification Griffith Thomas suggests that it is "the basis for our purity."¹²⁹

¹²⁶ T W Hunt, The Mind of Christ. (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishes, 1995), p 153

¹²⁷ Ibid, p 159

¹²⁸ W H Griffith Thomas, The Catholic Faith (London: Church Book Room Press Ltd, 1966), p 56

¹²⁹ Ibid.

Unbelieving Liberal Misconceptions

Initially this author makes the statement again about – Whose righteousness? The person's or Jesus' righteousness? Thus the discussion on the righteousness of the elect is through the true righteousness of Jesus in the heart of the believer. Thus what place has self-righteousness or self-centredness? This subheading above contains comments by this author and other authors on the problem of liberal theology and its relationship to self-righteousness or self-centredness.

This author examines the New Testament revelation of Jesus further in the discussion of McDowell in his chapter, “The Deity of Christ.” He discusses the misconception that Jesus of history is unknowable. He begins with the premise “if one were to study historically the life of Jesus of Nazareth, he would find a very remarkable man, not the Son of God.”¹³⁰ McDowell extensively quotes Montgomery who, in turn, was commenting on Kant and his presuppositions – but Montgomery makes an interesting point “and general philosophical scepticism is a nice intellectual game, but one

¹³⁰ Josh McDowell, The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict. Evidence 1 and 11. (Nashville, Tenn: Thomas Nelson, 1999), p xxxvii

cannot live by it.”¹³¹ Montgomery adds that historical events are “unique, and the test of their factual character can be the only accepted documentary approach that we have followed here. No historian has a right to a closed system of causation ...”¹³² and McDowell proceeds to conclude the argument by also quoting Schaff who comments “the purpose of the historian is not to construct a history from preconceived notions and to adjust it to his own liking, but to reproduce it from the best evidence and to let it speak for itself.”¹³³ McDowell does this and looks at evidence in his section, “External Evidence Test For The Reliability of the New Testament,” and he overviews and quotes extensively the writings of Eusebius, Clement, Ignatius, Moyer, Polycarp and Tatian, in addition to non-Christian writers of history – Tacitus, Suetonius, Josephus, Thallus, Pliny the Younger, Trajan, Talmud, Lucian, Bar-Serapion, the Gospel of Truth (non-Christian, Gnostic) and the Acts of Pontius Pilate.¹³⁴ Concerning the historical work of Pliny the Younger, cited above, McDowell quotes a reference and then comments on Pliny’s historical evidence with the note “this reference provides solid evidence that Jesus Christ was worshiped as God from an early date by Christians who continued to follow the practice of breaking bread together, as reported in Acts 2:42,

¹³¹ Ibid, xxxviii

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 55-60

46.”¹³⁵ This author further comments on the word “unknowable” above. Only the elect truly “know” Jesus. This is because the elect have the Holy Spirit (Jn 16:13-15; 1 Jn 2:20). The elect know and believe Jesus is God. God indeed in Jesus through the Holy Spirit convicts each believer of this true reality. Jesus is the centre of our history – the calendar is witness to this! The problem is that the liberals see the Gospel as “story” only. Some believe in a physical resurrection – not a spiritual one, and also vice versa. Rather than believe in both a physical and spiritual resurrection, some liberals limit their belief to a spiritual resurrection – they deny the empty grave. They deconstruct the Gospel.

Another important area of misconception raised by McDowell is in his section “Loving Christians Should Accept Other Religious Views.”¹³⁶ He comments on the word “tolerance ... (defining it) ...

¹³⁵ Ibid, 58

¹³⁶ This section noted here by McDowell is very important. This author emphasises the danger of liberals in general and liberal Roman Catholicism and Anglo-Catholicism initiated. This author knows that no born-again, Holy Spirit filled Christian could have any interest in postmodernism and the evil philosophy that is represented. Holy Scripture has been very clear in warning against such error. Indeed, Paul’s letter to the Colossians clearly defines heresies such as ceremonialism, asceticism, angel worship, depreciation of Christ which limits the supremacy of Christ, Gnosticism and reliance on human wisdom and tradition. This author examines these errors in greater depth shortly. In addition to the Letter to the Colossians, this author notes that John’s first Letter also examines Gnosticism and the evil of that duality in detail. This author now compares the work of McDowell with the work of Gary E Gilley (footnoted below). One aspect of postmodernism thought relates to the idea that all are saved, no exceptions. As Gilley states “... unless one knows Jesus Christ and His Gospel to be true, one cannot be a Christian at all. One remains entrapped in the kingdom of darkness.” However, Gilley goes on to provide a quotation from the eminent evangelist, Billy Graham, which clearly illustrates the extent of postmodernism into today’s pews and pulpits. “Even Billy Graham seems to have embraced inclusivity. He stated in a television interview with Robert Schuller, whether they come from the Muslim world, or the Buddhist world or the non-believing world, they are members of the Body of Christ because they have been called out by God. They may not know the name of Jesus but they know in their hearts that they need something they do not have, and they turn to the only light they have and I think that they are saved and they are going to be with us in Heaven.” (Gary E Gilley, [This Little Church](#)

as to recognise and respect other's beliefs and practices ...without sharing them ... put up with something not especially liked ... This is an important point especially in this postmodern age, and with a view that today "the new definition of tolerance is systematically being foisted upon the minds of all people ... Helmbock ... states the definition of new tolerance is that every individual's beliefs, lifestyle and perception of truth claims are equal ... your beliefs and my beliefs are equal, and all truth is relative."¹³⁷ This author needs to emphasise this incorrect postmodern liberal definition, as it is totally contrary to the truth of:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His One and Only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life ... whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on Him." (Jn 3:16, 36). Jesus said, "I am the Way, the truth and the Life. No-one comes to the Father except through me."(Jn14:6).

Stayed Home (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2006), p 41/42). This author encourages the reader to review the truth of Colossians 2:1-12. See further in Appendix 1.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

“Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under Heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” (Act 4:12).

This postmodern liberal teaching discussed is unloving as it does not acknowledge the true love of God which He gives to the true believer:

“Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” (1 Cor 13:6, 7)

Anything less than true Biblical truth¹³⁸ is evil.

This author thus comments on liberal philosophy¹³⁹ concerning scholarly and non-scholarly liberalism – the reality that they fall into the same error that Greek philosophy made in that they doubt the

¹³⁸ This author adds here great concern for the faith of “supposed liberal Christians.” Are they true born-again, Holy Spirit filled Christians? The reference 2 Tim 1:13, 14 mentioned below along with this author’s additional new reference of Romans 8:3-13 questions their true regeneration. An example of this author’s concern in relation to liberal error is a comment made at a meeting where it was said that “Allah equated to the God of the Bible” (here this means Allah = YAHWEH). This comment was the subject of a whole Anglican Ministry School and was of great concern. This author also refers to the Pope’s comments in Appendix.

¹³⁹ William C Placher, A History of Christian Theology. (Philadelphia, Penn: Westminster Press, 1983), p 68

possibility and the truth of Scripture by arguing cultural and social justice issues rather than simply trusting and yielding to the Word of God in faith through the Holy Spirit. This is evidenced from experiences that this author has occasioned when questioning, eg homosexual issues where scholarly and non-scholarly liberal comment is to refute Scripture (eg Rom 1:27; 1 Cor 6:9) by suggesting such Scripture is not relevant today. Further, this author has been confronted by the comment that this author needs to “move with the times” – a comment which is disturbing because this author reasons “these times” are not much different to the unbelieving times of the cultures of Greece and Rome and the philosophy of that time – a philosophy which the apostle Paul comments. (This author is reminded of 1 Cor 1:18-30). Again, this author reasons that the thoughts of non-scholarly and scholarly liberals in our age thus represent a “neo-gnostic” philosophy a dualism which revisits the second century Gnosticism where matter is evil and spirit is concerned to be good. This author reasons and emphasises that non-scholarly and scholarly liberalism of today bears much resemblance to the unfaithfulness and error of the Gnostics who “concluded that Christ had not really been a human being – he only seemed to be. Historians call this view Docetism ... ‘to seem.’”¹⁴⁰ This author also agrees with Placher’s comments

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

that “most Christians, however, eventually come to feel that Docetism would turn Jesus’ life into a sort of trick, an illusion ...Christians who believe Christ’s suffering and death on the cross save them from their sins feared that if Christ had only *seemed* to suffer and die, then they can only *seem* to be saved.”¹⁴¹ Placher then examines the aspect that “perhaps Jesus was not divine.”¹⁴² He answers this problem by emphasising that “only God never changes; only God is all powerful. For believers to be ultimately secure, trust in Christ needed to be trust in God.”¹⁴³ This author emphasises that God is the One True God of the Bible (Isa 45). This author also emphasises the truth of the Gospel of Jesus as God and His oneness with the Father (Jn 10:30; 14:9).

A further comment concerning liberal error is related to this author’s relationship with several liberal colleagues who have said that only the Old Testament is Scripture – but then in the same breath suggest that the Old Testament – the Law and the Prophets – is no longer relevant, especially within the area of the homosexual debate. This author is amazed at this statement when considered in relationship to the fact that the Letters of Peter, Paul and John are not recognised by liberal scholars as Scripture and the Gospels

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid, 69

¹⁴³ Ibid.

are “story”. Thus this author is drawn to the question then – What is left of Scripture? Is traditionalism¹⁴⁴ our saviour?

So in essence liberals are ignoring the whole Bible, especially when they also focus on universalism concerning the forgiveness and salvation offered through Jesus where they ignore God’s wrath (Jn 3:16 cf 3:36).

This author further discusses the relationship between righteousness in Jesus and self-righteousness or self-centredness. Glover, discussing humankind’s righteousness in Christ emphasises Jesus’ mission – “the ‘suffering’ of Christ, a scandal to the Gentiles as well as to the Jew, becomes the very thing that makes Him Christ, the proof of His Messiahship, the revelation of His nature, and His real and eternal glory. It is the pledge of love on God’s part that no-one could have dreamed, nor, without the cross, believed ... the whole difficult problem of righteousness, of sin and forgiveness, is solved. The cross is reconciliation, and ‘we have peace with God’” (Rom 5:1).¹⁴⁵ Glover follows these comments with his chapter “Not Having Mine Own

¹⁴⁴ This author recognises the difference between following traditions as we are directed to in Scripture opposed to elevating traditions above all else whereby the tradition or ritual itself is seen as the saving act.

¹⁴⁵ T R Glover, Paul of Tarsus. (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1938), p 69

Righteousness”¹⁴⁶ with a reflection about righteousness before the Lord Jesus came to complete His mission. He reflects on the Jewish casual attitude given to sin noting “the Jew was committed by the tradition of his people to the keeping of the Law; its manifold duties ... its picture of a jealous God insistent on righteousness to the utmost...”¹⁴⁷ and he focuses on “acquisition of merit as the goal.”¹⁴⁸ The whole endeavour of man intent upon merit was apt to become self-centred”¹⁴⁹ and he further notes Luther’s comment concerning “opinions of righteousness” that “there was a danger of legalism ...associated religion with law, and the latter will gain ground with the swiftness of an infectious disease.”¹⁵⁰ Glover then quotes R T Herford in his work on the Pharisees where he notes “Judaism in general, the Pharisaism in particular, was a religion which put the doing of God’s will in the first place, and faith in the second place; ...”¹⁵¹ This distortion is further emphasised by “fixing their eyes on God’s Law they lose sight of God.”¹⁵² This author uses these thoughts to further highlight that there is a parallel here with liberalism. The focus is on tradition, ritual and rubric and not fully on Jesus – on form rather than substance.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 72

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 75

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 76

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 76, 77

¹⁵¹ Ibid 77

¹⁵² Ibid.

Also, Dodd makes a comment on righteousness quoting Amos when he went to Bethel that he astonished the priests with the words from YAHWEH “Seek me and live.” (Am 5:4) This author reflects at this point on Amos’ truth (Am 5:24). Further Dodd speaks of “artificial righteousness”¹⁵³ and is in reality ungodly self-centredness.

Following this theme, Dodd discusses God’s command concerning “rightful service, His kindness, justice, chivalry towards the weak and suffering, integrity in business in social relations, incorruptibility in the administration of the law, honour in politics ... and practical virtues as are a basis of a sound society.”¹⁵⁴

This author agrees that these functions are important, however, the liberal church focuses more on these issues than evangelism which calls people – those chosen – to faith in Jesus who is our Saviour. Morals are important but they come after faith in Jesus. Morals and moral rules are part of obedience or wise actions (Jn 14:15). It is unity with Jesus as discussed below that is paramount.

¹⁵³ C H Dodd, The Authority of The Bible. (London: Fontana Books, 1960), p 95

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 98

Erickson comments on the believer's righteousness in Jesus "Christ and the believer have been brought into such a unity that Christ's spiritual assets, as it were, and the spiritual liabilities and assets of the believer are merged. Thus, when looking at the believer God the Father does not see him or her alone. He sees the believer together with Christ...as if God says, 'They are righteous!'"¹⁵⁵ Erickson quotes a number of passages (eg Rom 6:23; Eph 2:8-9). Faith in Jesus comes first, then works (Jas 2:18).

Baillie gives a good example of self-righteousness as he states Fichte who said, "I have no time for penitence ... no-one can atone for my misdeeds except myself, and I can only do it by leaving them behind".¹⁵⁶ Hunter emphasises that Jesus gives salvation – "which is redemption ... deliverance ... emancipation."¹⁵⁷ Hunter adds the references (Rom 3:24; Eph 1:7; Col 1:14; Gal 3:13; Rom 6:22).¹⁵⁸ This emphasis is that righteousness is only found in Jesus. Thus Hunter discusses other authors and emphasises that to be declared righteous simply means "forgiveness".¹⁵⁹ He also adds

¹⁵⁵ Millard J Erickson, Christian Theology. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), p 971, 2

¹⁵⁶ D M Baillie, God Was In Christ (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1961), p 161

¹⁵⁷ A M Hunter, The Gospel According to St Paul (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1966), p 19

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 20

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 21

that righteousness is not of man but a “saving activity of God.”¹⁶⁰ This author adds here that this relates to faith – a faith given by God (Eph 2:5-8). Moreover, it is Jesus reconciling the elect to Himself – Jesus the righteousness of the elect.

Elmslie highlights that righteousness is from God and that anything else is self-centredness and self-centred righteousness and he states that men “if they be content to ‘cleanse the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess’”.¹⁶¹ Elmslie explains that righteousness is to do completely with Jesus and His forgiveness, quoting Scripture “... Father forgive them for they know not what they do.”¹⁶² Further Elmslie brilliantly comments about self-centred righteousness – “the horrible hypocrisy of worship smugly offered by men whose hearts are stones ...”¹⁶³ Again this author emphasises the futility of liberal ritual.

Milne builds a case which emphasises that as men and women there is no way that they can be righteous through their own merit.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ W A L Elmslie, How Came Our Faith. (Great Britain: Collins Clear-type Press, 1962), p 82

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 345

He notes that “sin is universal”¹⁶⁴ and he cites Romans 3:10-12, 23; Psalm 14:1ff. He suggests Jesus was “without sin (Heb 4:15).”¹⁶⁵ Commenting on Calvin’s thoughts on humankind’s sinfulness, Milne adds that “the Bible also teaches our total depravity by saying that sin has affected the very core of the person.”¹⁶⁶ Further as a result he explains “We have no claim to moral self-justification.”¹⁶⁷ He emphasises that it is only Jesus and the result of His mission of salvation ... Christ’s righteousness ... - the “perfect righteousness of Christ.”¹⁶⁸ Milne cites the reference (Gal 3:13).

Concerning self-centred righteousness the Jews of the Old Covenant, and at the time of Jesus, thought that because they had the Scriptures of the Law they were saved. This author focuses on an important statement by Theissen who comments on “the demonstrative pride of the Law with an inability to perceive his own violation of the Law.”¹⁶⁹ (Jn 5:39)

Theissen summarises his points on self-righteousness or self-centredness by concluding with comments about Paul. He notes

¹⁶⁴ Bruce Milne, Know the Truth. (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982), p 104

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 188

¹⁶⁹ Gerd Theissen, Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology. (Phil: Fortress Press, 1987), p 241

“... only as a Pharisee could he claim that he was ‘blameless’ in righteousness of the law (Phil 3:6). As a Christian such a statement was for him impossible (cf Gal 3:11; Rom 3:23).”¹⁷⁰

Concerning the above about Paul it is obvious that he knew the Law and followed the Law exactly, “Once knowing the Law he realised it condemned him. When the veil fell from his heart through his encounter with Christ, he recognised the shadow side of his zeal for the Law.”¹⁷¹ Thus knowing Christ Paul adds:

“What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His suffering, becoming like Him in His death, and so, somehow, to attain the resurrection from the dead.” (Phil 3:7-11).

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 242

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

This author notes some very important points made by Murray. It concerns the question of righteousness. Firstly in his comment (Rom 2:13) he comments “This verse confirms or supports the proposition that the law will be the instrument of the condemnation announced upon those who have sinned under it. The emphasis in verse 13 dwells upon the difference between ‘hearers of the Law’ and ‘doers of the law’. The mere possession of the Law does not ensure favourable judgment on God’s part ... the Apostle is undoubtedly guarding against that perversion so characteristic of the Jew that the possession of God’s special revelation and of the corresponding privileges would afford immunity from the rigor of judgement applied to others not thus favoured.”¹⁷² This author makes comments about the Pharisees believing this, and refers to John 5:39.

This author is also encouraged by Murray’s comment about the reference (2 Cor 3:14) and the wonderful truth of our declared righteousness through faith and forgiveness and that it is found only in Jesus.

¹⁷² John Murray, The Epistle to the Romans. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1975), p 71

Similarly Anderson discusses self-righteousness and self-centredness which demonstrates “a worthless self-righteousness – indeed” ... he further states “The outwardly religious nation had failed to hear and obey YAHWEH’s demand for righteousness and justice (Am 5:24).”¹⁷³

This author is interested in the work of Seaton concerning Arminianism and how it limits the work of the person of Jesus. For reference the five points of Arminianism are:

1. Free will or human ability ...
2. Conditional election ...
3. Universal redemption or general atonement ...
4. The work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration limited by the human will
5. ... falling from grace ...¹⁷⁴

This author refers¹⁷⁵ to Seaton’s comments on Arminianism as they demonstrate a level of self-righteousness. They limit Jesus’ sovereignty giving humankind the ability to decide their own

¹⁷³ G W Anderson, The History and Religion of Israel. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p 114

¹⁷⁴ W J Seaton, The Five Points of Calvinism. (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), p 3

¹⁷⁵ This author, in this discussion opposing Erickson’s logical order, makes a further comment agreeing with Seaton’s work. Simply, the first breath taken the instant a person is born. Likewise, it is the same spiritually – when someone has been born-again they are then filled with the breath of God’s Holy Spirit.

election or salvation. Only Jesus, the eternal second Person of YAHWEH, the eternal Living Word, can do this (Jn 3:16).

Archer comments on liberal theologians' attitudes to the Old Testament and how in the development hypothesis Liberal theologians have watered down YAHWEH to "sweetness and light".¹⁷⁶ Further to the above Archer discusses Jeremiah 7:22ff and the amazement that Liberal scholars got it so wrong is surely a "masterpiece of misstatement and misrepresentation, shot through with fallacies from beginning to end, but it illustrates the perverted notion of Hebrew religion taught in many quarters today as a populization of the Wellhausen hypothesis. Suffice it to say that there is no parallel to this to be found anywhere else in human history ..."¹⁷⁷ In Archer's discussion legalism had resulted in a self-centredness, which in this author's mind reflects some word of Lewis:

"They seem to me to lack literary judgement, to be imperceptive about the very quality of the texts they are reading. To Bultmann's claim that the personality of Jesus

¹⁷⁶ Gleason L Archer, A Survey of Old Testament Introduction. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), p 157

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

was unimportant to Paul and John, Lewis replies, ‘through what strange process has this learned German gone in order to make himself blind to what all men except him see.’ And then he declares: these men ask me to believe they can read between the lines of the old texts; the evidence is their obvious inability to read ... the lines themselves. They claim to see fern-seed and can’t see an elephant 10 yards away in broad daylight.”¹⁷⁸

Further Archer emphasises that not only in the Old Covenant in the book of Amos should the people there have had “a true and living faith” as opposed to “a mere empty profession”¹⁷⁹ but it also applies to the scholarship of liberal theologians in the 19th century. This author concludes this section with the truth from Paul:

“What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.” (2 Tim 1:13, 14).

¹⁷⁸ John M Frame, [Apologetics to the Glory of God](#). (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: R & R Publishing, 1994), p 133

¹⁷⁹ Gleason L Archer, [A Survey of Old Testament Introduction](#). (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), p 351

The Truth of the Resurrection

This author now examines the deity of Jesus and the truth of the resurrection acknowledging the work of other authors.

Davis reminds this author of Jesus' true deity with comments on the resurrection and final judgement with the wonderful truth (Job 19:25-27) "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand upon the earth ...". He also quotes wonderful references (Mt 22:29-32; Jn 6:39-40; Rom 6:5) along with the truth of 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4. He concludes with references on judgment (eg Mt 13:39-42; 25:32-33, 46). This author is marvelled at the truth of this last reference (Jn 12:47-48) which confirms the truth that Jesus (Jn 3:17) that He did not come to condemn but to save. Those who do not accept Him condemn themselves (Jn 3:36). This author concludes with the simple comment on Davis' discussion about the eternal state – the joy of being "with Christ" (Phil 1:23). When mentioning the word "joy" this author is also reminded of the awesome truth that only believers have true "joy" as joy is a fruit of the Spirit – a condition of true belief in Jesus now and for all eternity. This author also adds that the believers' election and adoption, that state of belonging to Jesus is a great comfort and success for eternity.

This author is also encouraged by Davis here as he discusses Jesus' obedience which this author suggests gives practical understanding about wisdom. In addition to faithfulness and therefore righteousness, one of the most important characteristics of Jesus as mentioned by Davis is that of obedience. He always obeyed God's will (Jn 6:38), indeed He did exactly what His Father had commanded (Jn 14:30-31). Already mentioned is Jesus' authority to lay His life down and take it up again (Jn 10:18). Davis mentions God's command authorizing the Lord to do this (Jn 15:10). Jesus saves us from our sins by being our substitute¹⁸⁰ and being obedient to death "even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8).

Following on from this truth, this author notes Davis comments on the resurrection and ascension. He explains that "the resurrection was God's vindication of Christ's teaching and earthly ministry ..."¹⁸¹ and that by His death and resurrection, death and sin were defeated. This is the wonderful evidence that Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords deserving of our worship (Mt 28:9; Lk 24:36-39).

¹⁸⁰ Liberal scholars have urged all Christians to be tolerant of differences in basic beliefs. However, this would be compromising the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus. One would be acknowledging all belief systems must be correct. This is compromise at its worst (Acts 4:12). If one person's "truth" is diametrically opposed to another person's "truth" how can both be correct?

¹⁸¹ John Jefferson Davis, Basic Bible Texts. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), p 81

Of great importance is the reality as Davis explains that Jesus' body was a "real body that could be seen and touched."¹⁸² (Again Lk 24:36-39). Davis also highlights the wonderful truth that Jesus continues in His ministry that the "ascended Christ is now actively continuing His work through the ministry and mission of the church"¹⁸³ (Acts 1:1-2). This author also adds the wonderful joy for Christians of the guidance of His Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9). Further it is marvellous how the Holy Spirit guided Paul when he wrote the wonderful words concerning Jesus (Phil 2:9-11) and Davis notes the Hymn "Of Obedience and Humble Service"¹⁸⁴ which in this author's mind exemplifies the humility of Jesus (Mt 20:28) and also his exaltation as King of kings and Lord of lords with the Father now. Thus Jesus is the only Saviour (Acts 4:12) and thus the author of the believers' calling and salvation.

Frame begins briefly outlining miracles that "throughout the Scriptures God does wonderful works so that people will know that He is the Lord (Ex 6:7; 7:5, 17; 8:22; 9:14; 10:2; 11:7; 14:4, 18; 16:12; 29:46)"¹⁸⁵ to mention the beginning of God's works. He explains that during the ministry of Jesus that Jesus Himself made

¹⁸² Ibid, 82

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 83

¹⁸⁵ John M Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*. (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: R & R Publishing, 1994), p 143

many miraculous signs but that they rarely allowed people to soften their hearts and believe. Even the enemies of Jesus admitted to the miraculous but did not believe. Frame further explains that even the resurrection itself failed to “convince many”.¹⁸⁶ He continues with comments of Jesus’ rebuke to those who only wanted signs (Mt 12:39; Jn 4:48). This author is aware of the many New Testament references concerning miraculous signs and their “epistemological function” and, with respect to apologists many will say – well there are strange happenings. However, concerning the resurrection, already noted above with the appropriate references, this author is greatly encouraged by Frame’s words, except for the use of the word “story” in the passage which follows:

“The story of the Resurrection was related too soon after the fact to be the product of legendary development. The ornamentation and elaboration characteristic of legends is not there. The story of the women discovering the empty tomb bears remarkable marks of authenticity. No-one inventing such a story would have placed women in this role, because they were not acceptable witnesses in Jewish courts of law.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

Attempts to explain the Resurrection as something other than a supernatural event have always fallen flat. Some have said that Jesus did not actually die on the cross, but only fell into a coma, from which he was roused in the tomb. But in such a weakened condition, Jesus could not have rolled away the heavy stone and appeared to the disciples as the triumphant Lord of heaven and earth. Some have said that the disciples engaged in a conspiracy, but that has been dealt with above. Some have explained the post-Resurrection appearances as hallucinations or ‘visions’. But hallucinations do not work that way. They do not produce the same images in many persons, who then report that they have all seen the same thing.

The fact is, then that the Resurrection is as well established as any fact in history – indeed better than most, for it is attested by the Word of God itself.”¹⁸⁷

This author is further encouraged by Frame’s comments that the resurrection was credibly absolutely certain and that it is the word of God Himself and deserves “the highest standard of credibility.”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 146

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 147

McDowell, in his discussion on Jesus as Lord, comments on the resurrection in his Chapter “Support of Deity: The Resurrection – Hoax or History?” He begins by stating “the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the most wicked, vicious, heartless hoaxes ever foisted upon the minds of men, OR it is the most fantastic fact of history.”¹⁸⁹ He continues about Jesus’ credentials and explains “(1) The impact of His life, through His miracles and teachings, upon history; (2) fulfilled prophecy in His life; and (3) His resurrection.”¹⁹⁰ McDowell highlights the record of the resurrection (Mt 28:1-11; Mk 16; Lk 24; Jn 20, 21), and cites W L Craig concerning the importance of the physical resurrection of Christ – “Without the belief in the resurrection the Christian faith could not have come into being. The disciples would have remained crushed and defeated men. Even had they continued to remember Jesus as their beloved teacher, His crucifixion would have forever silenced any hopes of His being the Messiah. The cross would have remained forever the sad and shameful end of His career. The origin of Christianity therefore hinges on the belief of the early disciples that God had raised Jesus from the dead.”¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Josh McDowell, The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict. Evidence I and II. (Nashville, Tenn: Thomas Nelson, 1999), p 203

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 204

McDowell continues with the significance of the resurrection and that of the four world religions based on personalities that “only Christianity claimed an empty tomb for its founder.”¹⁹² He continues further with the true comment that “the resurrection is propounded as being (1) the explanation of Jesus’ death; (2) prophetically anticipated as the messianic experience; (3) apostolically witnessed; (4) the cause of the outpouring of the Spirit, and thus accounting for religious phenomena otherwise inexplicable; and (5) certifying the Messianic and Kingly position of Jesus of Nazareth... without the resurrection the Messianic and Kingly position of Jesus could not be convincingly established.”¹⁹³ Concerning historic fact McDowell cites W J Sparrow-Simpson who wrote “If the resurrection is not historic fact, then the power of death remains unbroken, and with it the effect of sin; and the significance of Christ’s death remains uncertified, and accordingly believers are yet in their sins, precisely where they were before they heard of Jesus’ name.”¹⁹⁴ McDowell explains that the “resurrection turned disaster into victory and without the resurrection Christianity would never have happened ... that without faith in the resurrection there would be no Christianity at all ... Christianity stands or falls with the

¹⁹² Ibid, 205

¹⁹³ Ibid, 206

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

truth of the resurrection.”¹⁹⁵ McDowell highlights the reference (1 Cor 15:7).

In addition to the New Testament witness above in the previous comments about the deity of Jesus. McDowell continues with the claims of Jesus that he would be raised from the dead – indeed His own predictions of His own resurrection (Mt 12:38-40; 16:21; 17:9; 17:22-23; 20:18-19; 26:32; 27:63; Mk 8:31-9:1; 9:10; 9:31; 10:32-34; 14:28, 58; Lk 9:22-27; Jn 2:18-22; 12:34; and also Chapters 14-16).

McDowell also spends considerable time in explaining the historical approach to the resurrection of Jesus as an event in history. He cites Wilbur Smith who commented “the meaning of the resurrection is a theological matter, but the fact of the resurrection is a historical matter; the nature of the resurrection body of Jesus may be a mystery, but the fact that the body disappeared from the tomb is a matter to be decided upon by historical evidence.”¹⁹⁶ This author comments here concerning the word “mystery” cited by Smith and is reminded that the Greek equivalent “mysterion” as

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 208

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 211

discussed in the section “Sovereignty of God – God’s Responsibility and Ours” has to do with something that was concealed but is now explained and revealed – and this is exactly true when examining the predictions that Jesus made in Scripture concerning His own resurrection. McDowell continues looking at the legal ramifications of the resurrection as fact and comments on the forensic aspects of Scripture noting Bernard Ramm who said “In Acts 1, Luke tells us that Jesus showed Himself alive by many infallible proofs (en pollois tekmeriois), an expression indicating the strongest type of legal evidence.”¹⁹⁷ McDowell further cites Ernest Kevan concerning eyewitnesses which have been discussed by LaHaye. However, Kevan also adds concerning the Epistles of the New Testament that they “constitute historical evidence of the highest kind ...”¹⁹⁸ In addition to the above authors McDowell cites J N D Anderson who discussed Moule who explained “from the very first the conviction that Jesus had been raised from death has been that by which their very existence has stood or fallen. There was no other motive to account for them, to explain them ... at no point within the New Testament is there any evidence that the Christians stood for an original philosophy of life or an original ethic. Their sole function is to bear witness to what they claimed as an event – the raising of Jesus from among the dead ... the one really

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 213

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 214

distinctive thing for which the Christian stood was their declaration that Jesus had been raised from the dead according to God's design ..."¹⁹⁹ Thus as Sparrow-Simpson adds to his previous citation, "the resurrection of Christ is the foundation of apostolic Christianity ..."²⁰⁰ This author adds (and this can also apply to the unbelief of liberal scholars who reject Paul and Peter's letters, and also John's Revelation as Scripture) that "those who deny His resurrection consistently deny as a rule His divinity and His redemptive work in any sense that St Paul would have acknowledged."²⁰¹ This author has noted that McDowell has much more to say on this marvellous foundational truth and concludes this section on the resurrection with McDowell's comment that "it may be said that the historical evidence for the resurrection is stronger than for any other miracle anywhere ... as Paul said, if Christ is not risen from the dead then our preaching is in vain and your faith is also vain."²⁰² This author acknowledges that McDowell has presented evidence for the resurrection of Christ in such a manner that would be acceptable in a modern day courtroom setting. This is not to deny the role faith plays in accepting the historical fact as part of God working in the lives of humankind.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 215

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

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APPENDIX

This author notes comments by the Rev Robert J Sanders, Ph D*, on the work “Evangelism Divided” by Iain H Murray (1) who lists all footnotes as End Notes.

“In regard to the fundamental theological divide within Protestantism, Murray rightly begins with Schleiermacher’s liberal theology. He describes this theology and notes its powerful effect on the church. Even as early as 1857, a leading evangelical, Charles Hodge, thought that some two-thirds of Germany and about the same for England were under the sway of Schleiermacher’s liberalism. Hodge defined the difference between liberalism and evangelicalism as follows.

The idea that Christianity is a form of feeling, a life, and not a system of doctrine, is contrary to the faith of all Christians. Christianity has always had a creed. A man who believes certain doctrines is a Christian. (2)

In 1924, Fosdick, a leading liberal, gave a similar description of the difference between liberalism and evangelicalism.

Today there are two parties in the churches. They are active in controversy now, and every day their consciousness of difference becomes more sharp and clear. The crux of their conflict lies at this point: one party thinks that the essence of Christianity is its original mental frameworks; the other party is convinced that the essence of Christianity is its abiding experiences. (3)

In response to liberalism, evangelicals banded together to promote their version of Christian truth. As heirs of the Reformation, they rejected the liberal heresy and refused to co-operate with liberals in various Christian endeavours such as conferences, evangelical campaigns, and ecumenical discussions. For the most part, however, very few evangelicals left the Church of England. They stayed because they recognized that the church still maintained its Reformation formularies (the Articles of Religion), and these documents were sufficient to uphold the integrity of the church.

In the 1950s, this began to change. Murray reports a number of developments. First, there was a shift in attitude toward non-evangelicals. John Stott, speaking as chair at an important evangelical conference in 1967, put it this way.

It is a tragic thing, however, that Evangelicals have a very poor image in the Church as a whole. We have acquired a reputation for narrow partisanship and obstructionism. We have to acknowledge this, and for the most part we have no one but ourselves to blame. We need to repent and change.
(4)

At this same conference Archbishop Ramsey was given the honour of the opening address. Ramsey was a liberal Anglo-Catholic, and he reminded his listeners that experience goes before theology. This is Schleiermacher. The conference proceeded to set forth basic evangelical doctrine, but at the same time it proclaimed a new approach to ecumenical dialogue. It was that as “long as anyone

confessed Jesus Christ as ‘God and Saviour’ there must be an acceptance of their Christian standing.” (5)

It must be said at this point, however, that the liberal heresy does not deny Jesus Christ as “God and Saviour”. It simply reinterprets the essentials of the faith in terms of a category that gives them a completely new meaning. I have described this elsewhere. Among other things, I pointed out that Stott may not fully grasp the gravity of the situation. He claims, for example, that if “the Church were to deny one of the central truths of the creed, like the incarnation, the atonement or the resurrection, it would cease to be a church. It would be apostate. Then we would be obliged to leave it. But thank God that lamentable situation has not arrived.” (6) This statement doesn’t get to the heart of the matter. The liberal faith does deny central truths of the faith. It reinterprets them along radically new lines.

Secondly, Billy Graham, one of the evangelicalism’s leading figures, began to develop ideas that softened if not abandoned certain critical evangelical beliefs. Originally, Graham did not include liberal churches and their leaders in his evangelistic campaigns. Eventually, however, Graham began to work with virtually all denominations except for churches such as the Unitarians. Some liberal clergy had reservations about Graham. Others had reservations, but they felt that conversion and subsequent church attendance were a good thing. Billy Graham could help them with that, and so they encouraged their members to attend his crusades and even participated themselves. It needs to be said here that liberals have no real theological problem with this approach. For them, the enthusiasm of a Graham crusade, the

altar call, the exclusive claims of Christ, may not be their cup of tea. But they recognize that piety varies from person to person, that faith is a good thing and that religion needs to be expressed according to each person's religious inclination and temperament. Therefore, many were willing to work with Billy. As a result of Billy Graham's crusades in England, evangelicals found themselves in increasing contact with non-evangelicals. The resultant personal contact diluted the significance of doctrine and strengthened the sense that Christianity is more a matter of the heart than doctrine.

Murray gives several reasons for Graham's shift in attitude. To begin with, American evangelism is essentially pragmatic.

Its goal is saving souls. Theological formulation is normally secondary. Further, Billy Graham and John Stott became good friends as did Graham and the liberal Anglo-Catholic Ramsey. These contacts led to a weakening of Graham's "exclusive" view of the faith. Finally, for my part, I doubt that Graham or those around him had ever been exposed to the substance of the liberal heresy. They doubtless knew that something was wrong. But Graham, if he is like many Americans, tended to see people as human beings first, and only later as persons of a particular theological stripe. This cultural factor doubtless played a role in his becoming comfortable with those of contrary theological convictions.

Subsequent history was to show a lack of apprehension of danger, a determination only to be charitable, and an increasing commitment to ecumenism, were to corrode the convictions which had initially been part of Graham's leadership. (7)

From all this it is clear that, while Graham has professed no change to his doctrinal beliefs, he had come to accept the primary idea of ecumenism that there is a shared experience of salvation in Christ which makes all differences of belief a very secondary matter. (8)

Finally, Graham, in a 1997 interview with Dr Robert Schuler, made the statement that even those who did not overtly know Jesus Christ – Moslems, Buddhists, Atheists - are members of the body of Christ. “They may not know the name Jesus but they know in their hearts that they need something they do not have, and they turn to the only light they have, and I think that they are saved and they are going to be with us in heaven.” (9) Schuler was ecstatic.

Along with Stott, there were a number of other important evangelicals, who gradually began to assume a “wider” vision of the Church. Murray lists such men as Colin Buchanan, David Watson, and Michael Saward. Under their leadership the idea emerged that the ground of unity among Christians was baptism. In 1977 an evangelical conference was held in Nottingham. Among its proceedings, the section on “The Church and Its Identity,” contained the following as its leading idea: “The church on earth is marked out by Baptism, which is the complete sacramental initiation into Christ and his body.” (10) This allowed evangelicals to enjoy fraternal relations with all baptized members of the church. In Murray’s view, this was a denial of evangelicalism’s Reformation heritage.

In protest against such an assumption the Reformation asserted a gospel which had at its heart the justification of the believing, repentant sinner by Christ alone, and this message they held to be so paramount that, without it, the church and sacraments are all of no avail for salvation. (11)

There were further developments. In 1975, the Church of England abolished allegiance to the thirty-nine articles and the majority of the evangelical clergy did not fight this decision. “The plain fact was that assent to the Thirty-Nine Articles was ended because liberals opposed the scriptural nature of the doctrine while Anglo-Catholics resented the rejection of Roman Catholic belief. Yet this was never openly admitted.” (12) Further, evangelicals historically had called for the disciplining of clergy who were not faithful to Scripture. This went by the board as well. As one so-called evangelical leader put it, “In an avowedly (though perhaps inadvertently) comprehensive Church, to find someone guilty of heresy and thus deprived of his or her post is in fact to flout the toleration factor in the life of the Church.” (13) In Murray’s view: “The approval of doctrinal ‘diversity’ has become the hallmark of one-time evangelicals who have risen to high positions in the Church and left definite convictions behind them.” (14) Finally, Murray introduces another development with these words,

I now turn to another feature which has marked evangelicalism in the English-speaking world since the 1950s, namely, a transference of leadership from preachers and pastors to evangelical intellectuals teaching in the academic world. (15) Instead of the old practice of clergy teaching

clergy it began to become common for bright students to go straight into teaching posts. (16)

“The new generation of younger evangelical leaders,” wrote Capon in 1977, “are primarily academics ... and their contributions at Nottingham showed they were beginning to grapple seriously with issues previously almost beyond evangelical reach.” They were engaged, he believed in “a continuing quest for a ‘respectable theology.’” (17)

According to Murray, the drift of intellectual leadership into the hands of academics had its greatest impact in the area of Scripture. Instead of a Scripture being in a book that spoke the Word of God, it became an ancient text whose meaning was tied to a medley of historical reconstructions. This had three primary effects. First, Scripture was taken out of the hands of “ordinary” Christian men and women. As such, its interpretation became the purview of scholars whose focus was the latest historical construction lying behind any given text. Secondly, since the focus was the human world behind the text, Christian belief in the Scripture was reduced to the uncertainties of historical constructions in which a broad toleration of opinion was allowed. And thirdly,

Finally, it follows that a denial of the full inspiration of Scripture leads to theological teaching and education which is destructive and futile rather than enriching and upbuilding in the faith. Instead of certainties, worthy to be preached and taught, students are introduced to what their lecturers trust are the latest results of biblical scholarship. (18)

Murray ends his book with a recognition that, from a New Testament point of view, the danger to the church is not materialism, or paganism, or any external danger. The real danger to the church, from the beginning to the end, is false teachers who corrupt the flock.

The idea that Christianity stands chiefly in danger from the forces of materialism, or from secular philosophy, or from pagan religions, is not the teaching of the New Testament. The greatest danger comes rather from temptations within and from those who, using the name of Christ, are instruments of Satan to lead men to believe a lie and to worship what in reality belongs to the demonic (2 Thess 2:3-9; Rev 13:11).
(19)

What should the church do about this?

Wrong belief is as dangerous as unbelief. To deny the deity and the work of Christ will shut men out of heaven as certainly as will the sin of murder (*John* 8:24; 1 *John* 2:22-23). To preach “another gospel” is to be “accursed” (*Gal* 1:6-9). Those who support heresies “will not inherit the kingdom of God (*Gal* 5:20-21). This means that a large part of the preservation and defence of the church lies in resolute resistance to falsehood and in forthright teaching of the truth. Such warnings as “beware of the doctrine of the Pharisees and the Sadducees” (*Matt* 23:13), run right through the New Testament. “Tax collectors and prostitutes” would enter the Kingdom of God before such false teachers (*Matt* 21:31). The apostles, filled with the Spirit of Christ, suffered no toleration of

error. They opposed it wherever it arose and required the same spirit of all Christians. (20)

A Few Additional Comments

To my mind, this text raises a fundamental question: “Who is a Christian?” One could ask, for example, whether doctrine defines who is a Christian? But that question is dependent upon a more fundamental question: “Who is Jesus Christ, and how is he known?” If Jesus Christ is given in his words and deeds, and if these last forever, then doctrine, the intelligibility of what he said and did, belongs to the essence of the Church and defines a Christian. This has been the position of the church from the beginning. If, however, as the revisionists assert, Jesus Christ is known beyond his words and deeds, if his words merely “point to” the mystical and ineffable Christ, then doctrine does not define the Christian.

Or, if being a believer in Jesus Christ is merely a matter of an external rite, such as baptism, then anyone can be a Christian who has had water poured over them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Scripture agrees that water baptism is important. One must be born of water and the Spirit (Jn 3:5). Theologically, baptism in water corresponds to what happened in Jesus Christ. It is immersion into his death and resurrection. Unless, however, this objective, external sacrificial death and resurrection becomes real in a person’s life, unless one receives, believes, follows Jesus Christ, and is born anew from above, the fact that a person is baptized does not mean they are Christians. It is the Spirit that enables a person to appropriate what is given externally and

objectively in Jesus Christ. Apart from the work of the Spirit, a person is still dead in their sins. One doesn't receive forgiveness without repentance. The triune name given in baptism, Father, Son, and Spirit, means that a person is originally created by the Father, redeemed by the Son, and made new by the Spirit who effects in believers through faith what was given them in the Son who reveals the Father. This seems obvious, and it is hard to believe that any Christian church would simply define Christians by baptism. Unfortunately I have heard the same here in the States on numerous occasions.

Archbishop Ramsey's claim that experience comes before theology may be true in some trivial sense. Everything we know has some basis in experience. The question for theology is, "What sort of experience is an experience of the true God, the Father of Jesus Christ?" Theology helps identify the true God. The doctrines of the Trinity and Christology help distinguish the true God from false ones. The claim "experience before theology," is misleading. At one level, it is virtually a truism. At another level, as actually used, it means an experience of something for which doctrine has no relevance. A "something" for which doctrine has not relevance. A "something" for which doctrine is meaningless is not the Christian God. The Christian God was and is defined by a Word, the Word Jesus Christ, and his words and deeds have intelligible content."

Endnotes

1. Rev Robert J Saunder, Ph D * <http://rsanders.org>

Murray, Iain H – *Evangelicalism Divided*, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2000

- 2 Murray, p 15
- 3 Murray, p 15
- 4 Murray, p 42
- 5 Murray, p 43
- 6 See the essay by Stott on the AAC website.
- 7 Murray, p 66
- 8 Murray, p 69
- 9 Murray, p 74
- 10 Murray, p 101
- 11 Murray, pp 102-3
- 12 Murray, p 265
- 13 Murray, pp 141-2
- 14 Murray, p 142
- 15 Murray, p 173
- 16 Murray, p 174
- 17 Murray, p 175
- 18 Murray, p 204
- 19 Murray, p 259
- 20 Murray, p 259. As references, Murray gives: Phil 1:27; Col 2:8; 2 Thess 3:14; 1 Tim 1:3-7, 6:3-5; 2 Tim 2:14-19; Titus 3:9-11; 2 Pet 2:1; 1 Jn 4:1-3; 2 Jn 7 and Jude



Catholic News Service

CNS Story:

" Pope made important overtures to non-Christian religions

By Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON (CNS) -- More than any pontiff in modern history, Pope John Paul II made important overtures to non-Christian religions, using documents, prayer meetings and personal visits to open the doors of dialogue.

In August 1985, when he visited Morocco at the invitation of King Hassan II, he became the first pope to visit an officially Islamic country at the invitation of its religious leader.

There, at a historic meeting with thousands of Muslim youths in Casablanca Stadium, he emphasized that "we believe in the same God, the one God, the living God." "

2005 Catholic News Service/USCCB.

This author has heard the current Pope - Pope Benedict say similar words on the Australian Broadcasting Commission Radio that he believes the god of Islam and the God of the Bible are the same.