

Approaching Reformed Theology

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Last Updated: 08/16/2022

Forward: This paper was originally written to facilitate a discussion with a brother in Christ in the local congregation that I currently attend; it has proved to be useful as a teaching tool for more than just said brother, and has been added to and amended since. It will be continued to be corrected and updated as appropriate. Anyone who comes into possession of this writing may pass it along freely to others; I do not claim originality in most, if not any, of the concepts discussed therein. I “stand on the shoulders of giants” in the faith as many have said; to such “giants” belongs more credit and honor than belongs to me, and I know we all give final and full credit and glory to God for such truths of His revealed Word.

A Common Pitfall In Rejecting Reformed Theology

When we approach the Bible, our attitude should not be one of “what do I see”, but rather “what does God say?” We should seek to conform our mind wholeheartedly to the clear exegesis of scripture through the aid of the Spirit, and not instead kick against the goads of the text with our own mental notions of what seems right, fair, or good. Only God through the revelation of His Word and in His Being determines righteousness, fairness, and good. We must be honest with ourselves and God, laid naked and bare in our thoughts in the light of His Word, willing to admit and be exposed when we bring our own presupposed, fallen notions of things like “love”, “grace”, and “mercy” to the text, of which all can be challenged when facing the truths of reformed theology, leading us to reject and push-off of His Words instead of conforming to what He has spoken.

John 4:23-24

“But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”

John 14:26

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” - KJV

Seeing Things Simply (“Unconditional Election”, “Irresistible Grace” & “Perseverance of the Saints”)

In this section, we will examine 2 simple logical truths found in just one passage of scripture, affirmed in many others, that display to us some of the bedrock truths of reformed theology. These two truths are as follows:

Scriptural Logic Truth 1: No man can believe in Jesus unless the Father has given him to Jesus

John 6:37

“But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not. All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”

John 6:44

“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.” (KJV)

John 6:65

“And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.” (KJV)

Scriptural Logic Truth 2: Jesus will not lose one of whom the Father has given Him

John 6:37

“But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not. All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” (KJV)

John 6:39

“And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.” (KJV)

John 10:28

“And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” (KJV)

The Necessary Logical Conclusions

Primarily through one passage of scripture, John 6, supported with other verses in the book of John, we see two very simple logical truths emerge from scripture:

- 1) Nobody can believe in Jesus, which means no one can believe the Gospel message, the message through which faith in Christ is found, unless God the Father has willed that they believe, or “given” them to Christ (John 6:37, 44, 65)
- 2) Anybody who has been “given” to Jesus through faith cannot be “lost” or “plucked” out of Christ’s hands; they “shall” come to Christ (John 6:37,39 & John 10:28). If the Father has given them to Jesus, then they cannot refuse being given (“lost”); they “shall” come. And, they can’t be stolen from Christ’s hands (“plucked”), by Satan or the influence of unbelievers

From these very simple logical truths found in scripture, we see the bedrock truths of what is frequently called “reformed theology” or Calvinism. *(I personally think it is scripturally inappropriate to claim allegiances to the teachings of a specific person (1 Corinthians 1:12), so I prefer “reformed theology”, which is a statement about the period of reformation in which many scriptural truths were brought to light against the corrupt teachings of the Catholic church at the time.)*

Logical truth #1 is the basis of “election”, mentioned in ample verses in the Bible; “election” is the biblical truth that God has elected only some people to salvation on the basis of His own divine will. As the previously cited scriptures say, “no man may come to me” unless “given” / “drawn” by the Father; this means that we can preach the Gospel message to someone until they are blue in the face, but if God has not willed that they be given to Christ, then they will never believe the message. This is in fact literally what we see Jesus doing in John 6; He is repeating Himself continuously in front of them, until He is blue in the face metaphorically speaking, and simultaneously explaining to them why they aren’t believing. He goes so far as to say very offensive things to them regarding the drinking of His own blood, which would be a violation of their law as they still understood it as handed to Moses (Leviticus 17:14); to such listeners this would be a bold offense causing shock and awe, a statement that according to the flesh we would think would get their attention, but it does not, because being born of the Spirit is no matter of the flesh. They do not need to find some inner will or strength by which they believe the Gospel, nor is there any amount of work or effort that we can expend to make them see the truth; it is God who decides who will know Him. This reality of point #1 is what is referred to as “unconditional election” in the acronym T.U.L.I.P that is commonly taught in reformed theology.

As an aside, this is all not to argue that our effort does not matter; God’s Word clearly teaches that the harvesting of His elect occurs through our faithful proclamation of the Gospel message and our witness of living the lives that He has called us to (Romans 10:14-15); we would all do very well in proving effective and fruitful for Christ (2 Peter 1:8) if we were to all embrace Paul’s deeply held convictions of his ministry regarding the elect:

“Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” - 2 Timothy 2:10

In Paul's words alone we see that there is absolutely no room for the truths of reformed theology to somehow cause us to be derailed in our concern, conviction, and laboring for the sake of God's kingdom; Paul himself originally taught us most of these reformed truths, and he worked harder in his ministry than any other the apostles (1 Corinthians 15:10). Unfortunately, many indeed have intellectually ascended to such truths of election, etc., but are lacking in the "brother love" which is the culmination of a sincere and fruitful faith (2 Peter 1:7). We should be careful and cautious that we do not end up like such individuals; if we find ourselves slipping down the slopes of complacency and inaction for the Kingdom as a result of reformed truths, or if we find ourselves operating in a spirit of arrogance and aggression over such truths (commonly known as "cage stage Calvinism", because such people would be best locked in a cage until their character becomes more mature in their knowledge of such things), then we must step back and seek to understand where we have misunderstood or missed God's intent in our understanding such truths.

Also, in addition to the concept of "unconditional election" demonstrated in logical truth #1, with the words "they shall come" in John 6:37, we get a taste of the Word's teaching of "irresistible grace". Regarding such irresistible grace, if God has written a person's name in the book of life mentioned in Revelations 20:15, then we have no power to erase our name, and praise God for that, for surely all of us would if left to our own accord; if left to our own wills, which are dead in trespass and sin (Ephesians 2:1), to make a decision to receive the Spirit given by grace, none of us would choose to do so; we would all surely spit in the Lord's face and spurn such a gift because of our depravity inherited through Adam. Instead, God, in His unioning of His Spirit with our souls, implants Himself in us, and, since He is unable to deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:13), we who are unioned with the Spirit are also therefore unable to deny Him either. By this mechanism of union, which is reflected in human marriage (Ephesians 5:31-32), His grace is irresistible and we are unable to deny the salvation given to us in Him; once God is joined to us in Spirit by His own good pleasure and Will, we are permanently and forever tethered to Him, and though small and unnoticeable at first, like a mustard seed, over time with watering and cultivating, we will inevitably grow into a fruit bearing fruit.

Logical truth #2 is the basis of what is known as "perseverance of the saints"; this is the scriptural reality that if we are given to Jesus according to point #1, then there is no leaving Him. We cannot deny the faith the Father has called us to, and we cannot be plucked from His hand. Just before the previously quoted verse of John 10:28, we read in verses 26-27:

"But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (KJV)

Though we may become a lost sheep who needs to be rescued (Matthew 18:12-13), we cannot ever become completely lost such that we become a goat (Matthew 25:31-33). Most important to this point is the fact that we ourselves cannot deny the faith given to us; if God truly has given us the Spirit (Romans 8:9), then we are not able to jump ourselves out of Christ's hand, as previously discussed regarding irresistible grace. A common pitfall of those who reject reformed theology is that they argue man's will is free apart from God, and that man has the power to

reject God's will; this is a topic we'll address later from a different perspective, but for now it is sufficient to point out that this claim goes directly against Christ's teachings that He will not lose one of all whom the Father has given Him.

Indeed, what we see in these two simple logical truths is the fact that the process of salvation is dominated by the will of the Father; only those whom He wills are given to Jesus, and those who are given to Jesus cannot be lost. This domination of the process of salvation is exactly the point which our consciences war against for many reasons when we first come to these truths, and such warring is exemplified by Paul's challenger in Romans 9:

18 Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

19 Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? (KJV)

Here, Paul exemplifies the reality of such rebellious attitudes we find in ourselves to these truths of scriptures; if God's will dominates salvation, how can we be truly guilty? What fault can He find if He willed it? How is that loving? How is that "good"? To such answers, Paul responds:

"Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" - Romans 9:20-21 (KJV)

For the sake of brevity, I will not dive now into the full theological understanding and explanations which we are to gain from these and the verses just after, as well as many others, but, I will call attention to the main point of Paul's response: affirmation of God's sovereign domination over salvation. We are "pots", made by Him, the "Potter", and we are made for different uses according to His will; some for "honorable" use, elected to salvation, and others for "dishonorable" use, consigned to disobedience and rebellion (Romans 11:32), so that God's mercy may be seen in the vessels made for honor (this is the teaching of verses 22-23 which follows those previously cited):

"And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory," - Romans 9:23

A key take away from this for the sake of our conversation is the fact that God has decided, or "predestined" (Ephesians 1:4-5, Romans 8:28-30), who is made for honorable use and who is made for dishonorable use; He did not "look into the crystal ball of the future" before He made earth and mankind to see who would receive the Gospel message according to their own will, which is the common argument that those who reject reformed teachings suggest to be true; rather, He pre-ordained, or pre-chose, according to His own "good pleasure" of will, who He

would save to eternal life, just like a parent only chooses one or a few children, according to their good pleasure, when they go to an orphanage to adopt:

“According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,” - Ephesians 1:4-5 (KJV)

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.” - Romans 8:28-29 (KJV)

Romans 9, in accordance with John 6 and many other passages, teaches us that He made us as specific pots for specific use and purpose. Our coming to salvation, being a vessel for “honorable” use, is specifically the result of God “electing” it to be so “according to the good pleasure of his will”; He did not have to bow down and be subject to our wills, as if we could decide to reject His will of our salvation, as if a baby could reject its adoption at an adoption agency, rather, we are to bow down and be subject to His will. We are the pots; He is the Potter. Regarding this analogy of the Potter and pots, we can see that Paul was actually quoting Jeremiah 18 when he used this analogy; we see that even the old testament is in accord with this teaching, especially as affirmed also in Romans 11 regarding the “remnant” of grace preserved in the old covenant.

Additional Logic of the Spirit (“Unconditional Election”)

If you’re a baptist, believing in “born” again salvation by the Spirit, then if you believe what scripture has to say about how we receive the Spirit, you are implicitly reformed:

John 3:3,5-6,8 (KJV)

“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. ... 5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”

The greek word for “listeth” is ‘thelo’, which Strong’s gives the following definitions for:

- “To will, have in mind, intend, to be determined, to desire, to wish, to take delight in”

All of those definitions for ‘thelo’ in Strong’s clearly communicate that the subject of this word ‘thelo’ has its own will, its own mind, its own desires, its own delight in; so, “the wind bloweth where it listeth” means “the wind blows where it: wills, has in mind, desires, wishes, has self-determined. This verse teaches us then that “every one who is born of the Spirit” is a

recipient of the wind of the Spirit which came to them not according to their own will, but the will of the Father who is one with the Spirit. The ESV translation captures this meaning well:

John 3:8

“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (ESV)

In John 6, the very passage where we have seen these bedrock truths of reformed theology, we also find Christ Himself affirm the work of the Spirit in bringing those to faith who believe His words, all contextualized by the Father’s will “giving” and “drawing” His elect to Jesus:

John 6:63

“It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.” - (KJV)

So, this is all to say, that if we are “born again”, or have a spiritual birth by the Spirit, it occurs not according to any will of our own, but the Father’s will. God works out His plan of salvation in the new covenant through the preaching of the Gospel message; we go and spread the seed of the Gospel message, but only those who are given the Spirit, born again, are able to receive the message and find faith in Jesus. The ground, the soil which the seed falls on, is tilled and made ready by the Spirit; only seeds which fall on soil (persons) who have been given the Spirit will sprout fully and endure unto salvation. Therefore, if you are a “born again” believer, you are implicitly reformed according to the scriptures which teach “born again” theology, because they all affirm that being “born again” is a work of the Spirit, according to His will, and not ours. Only the elect receive the Spirit by which we find faith in Jesus, and we are unable to reject this work of God, lest we be the ones who are “sovereign”, with God bending His will to us instead of us to Him as the Potter.

Some Scriptures of T.U.L.I.P

Total Depravity

Ephesians 2:1

“And you hath he quickened (*by the Spirit as we just discussed!*), who were dead in trespasses and sins;”

Ephesians 2:5

“Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (*again, “quickened” by the Spirit!*), (by grace ye are saved;)”

Romans 3:12

“They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”

Romans 11:32

“For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.”

Luke 18:19

“And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, that is, God.”

- If only God is “good” and capable of good spiritual works, then man, dead in sin, can contribute nothing to his own salvation, and has no spiritual ability to maintain or hold on to his own salvation. Such holding on is consistent only with a “good” work of God, consistent with Philippians 1:6

Psalm 14:2-3

“The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”

Genesis 8:21

“And the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done.”

2 Corinthians 4:4

“In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”

Unconditional Election

Ephesians 2:8-10

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

Romans 8:29-30

“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”

Ephesians 1:3-5

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,”

2 Timothy 1:9

“Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,”

John 15:16

“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.”

John 6:44

“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.” (KJV)

John 6:65

“And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.” (KJV)

Limited atonement

Matthew 1:21

And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.

Matthew 26:28

“For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many (*not “all”, but “many”*) for the forgiveness of sins.”

Hebrews 9:28

So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many (*not “all”, but “many”*); and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

Revelation 20:15

And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

- Christ’s blood counts not for those who are cast into the lake of fire; their sins are not atoned for

John 17:9

“I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.”

- This can be greatly contrasted against common Arminian argument on John 3:16 regarding “God so loved the world”, as if that is an argument against limited atonement. As discussed elsewhere in this writing (see section “Quibbling over Atonement”), God’s love of the world and Christ’s purchase of authority over it through His blood is in no way affirmation of atonement for all the sins of the world. Christ does not even pray for everyone in the whole world, for not all have their name written in the book of life with atonement for their sins in His blood; how then can we even begin to say that his blood atones for all if He doesn’t even pray for all, prayer being a much lesser thing than the atoning work of Christ’s blood.

Irresistible Grace

John 6:37-40

“But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not. All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.”

Romans 8:29-30

“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”

Ephesians 2:8

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:”

Acts 16:14

“And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.”

Perseverance of the Saints

John 6:39

“And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.” (KJV)

John 10:28

“And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” (KJV)

Philippians 1:6

“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:” (KJV)

1 John 2:19

“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.” (KJV)

An Arminian Pitfall

One major idea that Arminians commonly get hung-up on is the idea that "predestination", "foreknowledge", and "election" refer only to God's ability to see the future and order it such that He can give salvation to those who already receive it when offered to them, instead of everyone whom God elects receiving it by His sovereign will. That is to say, instead of God making pots for honorable and dishonorable use, He must look into the future, see who will turn out to be an honorable vessel and accept His offer of mercy and grace according to their own will, and then to those who turn out to be such persons are given the gift of the Spirit. To this, we can say the following from a reformed perspective:

If we have the ability to resist God's giving of the Spirit to us in a salvific sense, then He is not sovereign over salvation. If such a thing were possible, then God's ordination of all of history must bow to our wills, because if we allegedly have the ability to resist salvation after He tries to give us the Spirit, then it is not He who is sovereign, rather us in our final ability to have our will of denial overrule His will of grace and salvation. God's "sovereignty" carries the meaning that every event of all of eternity and history, both spiritual and temporal (or "earthly" history), occur according to God's ordained plan; however, if man is able to reject God's offer of salvation on our own accord, then God is not sovereign and cannot ordain every event to be as He wills. If our "wills" are given the power to resist God's will, then we are sovereign and not Him; He must order events according to our choosing our denying His gift of grace, which means He bows to the pots, and not the pots to the Potter. Such a teaching is simply the rejection of the supremacy and authority of God and scripture.

Not only simply does this idea reject and deny the clear teachings of scripture that we are all born "dead in our trespasses and sins", and that none of us is good, "no, not one" (Psalm 14:2-3), but also in such a scenario, we are asserting that there is something inherently good in some people that they would choose salvation over others. If indeed it were possible that we could resist God's sovereign will of a gift of salvific grace, and that only those who accept it in their own will are able to be saved, then we are implicitly saying that there is something better about those people who decided to accept then reject, and if indeed salvation is received only by those who somehow have innate strength over others to accept, then salvation is not grace at all, rather it is found on the basis of merit.

If I have to have some strength in me to accept salvation apart from God simply giving it as a gift, then we make salvation about me and my ability and not God's saving mercy and grace. If we stand two person's side-by-side, say their names are "John" and "Travis", and one of them is saved, let's say "Travis" is, and John is not, then, according to Arminian theology, we must ask ourselves: what in Travis enabled him to believe over John? If being born of the Spirit is not only according to the grace and mercy of God, but also requires the co-agency of man's will to be received, then what about Travis enabled him to believe over John?

With reformed theology, Travis believed because God gifted him the Spirit, according to God's will of election and predestination, and once Travis is given the Spirit, there is no turning away from it; this leaves Travis's salvation completely in the hands of God, completely in the hands of grace and mercy, and according to no will of Travis's, which is exactly what Ephesians 2:8-10 states:

8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (KJV)

However, if we take the Arminian perspective that God gives the Spirit through some amalgamation (combination/ union) of the Spirit with the human will in such a way that it can then later be rejected, a.k.a “prevenient grace” as they say, then: a) God is not sovereign over salvation, rather man, because every man then has within him the power to reject God’s work of the Spirit, which violates scriptures on multiple accounts, and then b) a man’s acceptance and continuation of the Spirit is then attributed to a work that he did in himself. If God’s work of grace is only “prevenient”, then the continuation or later rejection of this grace, the final determiner of whether the grace remains or is rejected, is a work of man; either the man who as received the “prevenient” grace must complete a work to hold on and continue in this work of grace, or he must let go and reject it. In either case, the final work becomes a work of man in which he “may boast”.

Back to our example of Travis and John, according to Arminian theology, we would have to say that Travis is able to boast in his choice of, and continuation in, his salvation because something in him enabled him to receive God’s gift, which directly violates Ephesians 2:8-10 and the ample other scriptures we have seen; one other specific scripture that these ideas stand in direct violation of is Philippians 1:6, quoted previously, which says that “He who began a good work in you will perform it, or continue it, until the day of Jesus Christ”. There is no way to dance around this verse; salvation is a work begun by God and sustained by God; man has no ability to hold on to and continue it himself. No work can be attributed to man in regards to his being saved or in his remaining in the faith; it is all God’s work.

To avoid this pitfall of Arminian thought, we should “hold fast to that which is good” and “prove all things” according to scripture (1 Thessalonians 5:21); when a system of theology leads us to logical conclusions that are in clear and plain opposition to the teachings of scripture, we must keep in step with the Spirit and flee from such teachings. Some theological teachings of scripture are indeed complex and deep; even Peter himself says that some of the teachings of Paul are hard:

“As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.” (KJV)

“as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.” (ESV) (for better understanding)

And, the disciples themselves when confronted by Jesus after His teachings on election in John 6, say:

“Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?” - John 6:60 (KJV)

But then Peter, after being confronted by Jesus, says:

“Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.” - John 6:68 (KJV)

So therefore let us be like Peter and the other disciples who, even in the face of hard and difficult teachings, hold fast to the Lord, knowing that these are indeed His words and they are the words of eternal life.

Quibbling over Atonement

The False Prophet

Some would cite the following scripture as an argument against the idea of “limited atonement” taught by TULIP:

“But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.” - 2 Peter 2:1

To some, this passage seems to some to be teaching that the words “the Lord that bought them” means that the sins of the false prophets (old covenant) and false teachers (new covenant) are atoned for in Christ, just like the sins of the world as some would claim using John 3:16. With only some minor rational thought we can see such teachings as nonsensical.

We know from scripture that the wages of sin is death (eternally speaking, Romans 6:23, Revelation 21:8); in other words, those who will go to hell are condemned there because they will be judged according to their sins and not the righteousness of Christ; only those who are found faithful in Christ will be saved from hell. Everyone else will be identified with and according to their sins, which means their sins have not been forgiven. If their sins have not been forgiven, then there is no atonement for them. The sacrificial ceremonial system of the old covenant was a “shadow” system of atonement for covenant Israel, pointing to the full atonement found in the sacrifice of Christ, revealed through the inauguration of the new covenant by His death, burial, and resurrection (Hebrews 10:1-12). Therefore, false prophets, who were “tests” from the Lord were to be stoned to death for their false prophecy (Deuteronomy 13:1-5), and false teachers, or heretics, under the new covenant, are persons who are given over to “destruction” and damnation. Therefore, “the Lord that bought them” cannot mean that their sins are atoned for in the Lord, because then they could not be condemned to hell because their sins would be forgiven in Christ; if false prophets and false teachers will be identified with their sins and condemned to hell, then we cannot say their sins have been atoned for, because then they would be forgiven and not condemned.

No, instead, what “the Lord that bought them” means, is that Christ’s work of being the perfect sacrifice through the cross, and in His resurrection, bought Him all authority and power over all of heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18). Christ is seated at the right hand of the father in Heaven

(Hebrews 8:1, 12:2), having His enemies be made His footstool (Psalm 110:1-7). The word “bought” carries the meaning that all of creation, including the false prophet and reprobate in mind, are under the power, authority, and control of Christ. Their sins are not atoned for in Him, for then they would be forgiven; rather, the Lord uses them as instruments of His divine wrath and discipline, testing His own people. This is exactly what we see the false prophets used for as stated in Deuteronomy; they are “tests” from God of His people’s faithfulness:

“13 If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder,

2 And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them;

3 Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.”

Christ’s work on the cross, and His oneness with the Father, “bought” Him authority over all reprobates and gives Him the power and authority over all of creation, both under the old covenant, prior to the revelation of His death and resurrection, and in the new covenant. This includes false prophets, false teachers, and even pagan nations. We see again the use of reprobate nations as the instruments of His divine discipline and wrath against His people in Isaiah when He uses the Assyrians against Israel (Isaiah 10, see John MacArther article link below); Christ has authority and power over all, “bought” with the price of His blood through the cross, and established in His resurrection and ascension to His seat on the throne at the right hand of His father.

<https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B200401/divine-sovereignty-and-human-responsibility>

“Sins of the World” & Limited Atonement

There are a few verses in the Bible, which mention the “sins of the World” being taken away in Christ, that some in opposition to reformed theology cite as evidence against the reformed tenant of “limited atonement”; before even citing some of these verses, let it first be noted, that even if such an objection can be substantiated, members of the opposition commonly use the possibility of the validity of this objection as a means of throwing out all of the reformed theology doctrines. To some, if one tenant is wrong, then out with the bath water goes the baby and all of the system of theology is disregarded; such handling of a system of theology is inappropriate and juvenile. The Bible says that love “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things”; meaning, the nature of biblical love is to give the benefit of the doubt. Such love would say that even if we have legitimate suspicion over a particular teaching, we ought to be able to examine it with gentleness and patience and have our current understanding of the faith tested against it.

Some opposed to reformed theology instead use such suspicion as justification of an attitude of unequivocal dismissal of all possible truths in the reformed teaching, instead of finding agreement wherever agreement can be found. It is the latter which is to always be encouraged, recognizing that time and providence may be required to reconcile perceived errors with truth, either through correction of our perception or in proper revelational understanding. Indeed, some refer to themselves as “4 point Calvinists” or otherwise to denote minor disagreement but overall approval; we should much prefer such practices over unequivocal rejection. What greatly increased harmony, unity, and growth could be found in churches if they could step united to even 4 points of the tenants of T.U.L.I.P instead of remaining embedded in division and immaturity in the Word because of debate over one tenant alone.

We will also make note now, as many other theological institutions regularly call attention to, that the “5 points of Calvinism”, known as T.U.L.I.P, were not specifically codified by Calvin himself; T.U.L.I.P is the acronym given to the five “points of doctrine” given in the “Canons of Dort”, which were the result of the “Synod of Dort” that met in 1618/1619 to deal with the growing teachings of “The Remonstrants” who followed the teachings of Jacobus Arminius, from whom followers of “Arminianism” get their name (not to be confused with the Armenian church). This should be of interest to us not because the Canons of Dort teach anything that is not in accordance with Calvin’s teachings, but because we need to understand the origins of the term “limited atonement” so that we can properly handle its intended meaning. In doing so, we discover that a great deal of modern debate over “limited atonement” is the result of a misunderstanding and mischaracterization of its original meaning; we find the evidence of this in Calvin’s words himself from his commentaries, but first, let’s review the verses which are commonly in reference when limited atonement is in dispute:

John 3:16-17

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, ... For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

1 John 2:1-2

“... But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”
(KJV)

John 1:29

“The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (KJV)

The obvious and clear emphasis of these verses is that Christ’s death on the cross functions as the “propitiation” for the sins “of the whole world”; there is simply no avoiding the language of these verses, nor, as we’ll see, must we strive to do so. We can note now that the English

verbiage of “the world might be saved through him” and “takes away the sin of the world” cannot literally mean the sins of everyone in the world are literally taken away in Christ, because then no-one could be condemned to hell; as previously discussed in the section entitled “The False Prophet”, we know from Romans 6:23 and other verses that “the wages of sin is death” (eternally speaking), which means that those who will be condemned to hell will be identified with their sin which brings the wages of death. Therefore, plainly and obviously we can discern that neither John 1:29 nor John 13:16-17 can be literally teaching against the reality that a great many persons will be identified with their sin and condemned to hell; given that 1 John 2:2, which uses the clarifying word of “propitiation”, also uses similar verbiage as John 1:29 and John 13:16-17 regarding the “sins of the World”, we will discover that the key to understanding these verses therefore lies in use of this word “propitiation”. First though, let’s take a look at the words of none other than Calvin himself to see what he had to say about such verses as John 3:16-17:

“It is a remarkable commendation of faith, that it frees us from everlasting destruction. . . . And he has employed the universal term whosoever, both to invite all indiscriminately to partake of life, and to cut off every excuse from unbelievers. Such is also the import of the term World; . . . he shows himself to be reconciled to the whole world, when he invites all men without exception to the faith of Christ, which is nothing else than an entrance into life” (Commentary on John, Vol. 1).

Calvin literally uses the words “... shows Himself to be reconciled to the whole world”; he clearly has no desire or intention to dodge the clear teachings of the text. However, we must be careful and nuanced according to Calvin’s own words. Calvin clearly sees in such teachings of scripture that God, from His own perspective, is “reconciled to the world”, but no implication is given regarding man’s reconciliation to God. Indeed, if we look at any human relationship within which sin may occur, and later repentance and reconciliation, we clearly see that for the relationship to be “redeemed”, both parties in the relationship must extend the hand of reconciliation and meet in the middle with a loving handshake. The picture we are given in John 3:16-17 and 1 John 2:2 is a picture of God extending His hand to all men, His wrath against them temporarily appeased through the blood of Christ and His desire to be reconciled to all of them being communicated through His offer of salvation through the Gospel message; there is, however, no implication in such teachings of the whole World’s decision to reconcile with God. We are shown a picture of God with a hand outstretched, a hand of reconciliation offered to all because Christ’s blood is sufficient to appease His wrath over sin temporarily while He extends His offer of reconciliation. Any and all sinners, the whole World, is approached with such a hand of reconciliation; God’s eternal wrath of punishment against their sin is truly appeased in Christ, temporarily, while there still remains time to reach out and grab His hand of reconciliation. If, however, they do not reach out and reconcile with Him, then at Christ’s second coming God’s wrath will no longer be appeased against those who will be identified with their sins and not Christ.

This reality and picture of the appeasement of God’s wrath against sin is in fact exactly what the word “propitiation”, used in 1 John 2:2, means; it is through Christ’s propitiatory work, or His “expiation” (see R.C. Sproul reference at the end of this section for a further explanation of

“expiation” vs “propitiation”), that God’s wrath against the sins of the world can be appeased, so our understanding of these scriptures hinges on properly understanding propitiation and its roots. For the root Greek word of propitiation, ‘hilasmos’, Strong’s Lexicon gives the definition of “an appealing” or “the means of appeasing”. The word “propitiation” itself has a Latin root word of ‘propitius’, with the definitions of “favorable, well-disposed, kind”. Simply said, Christ’s blood spilled via the cross, or His being our expiation, enables God to have a disposition of “kindness” and “favorability” to the entire world during the time of this World’s existence prior to Christ’s second coming. Having examined Calvin’s words already, we find him in agreement with such truths, and, we find the Canon of Dort in agreement with them as well when it says the following in “Article 3: The Infinite Value of Christ’s Death” of the section of the Canon of Dort entitled “The Second Main Point Of Doctrine”:

“This death of God’s Son is the only and entirely complete sacrifice and satisfaction for sins; it is of infinite value and worth, more than sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world.”

Setting aside the verbiage that implies the idea of limited atonement in this latter half of the quotation, the canon first states Christ’s death “entirely”, “complete”-ly “satisfies for sins”; thus, the statements of the Canon of Dort are in direct agreement with the verses cited, in that God’s wrath against sin is “appeased”, or “completely satisfied”, for the whole World while His hand of reconciliation remains outstretched. Again, it is worth emphasizing that there is absolutely no implication of the “World”’s desire to reconcile with God in any of this discussion; only the appeasement of God’s wrath against the sins of the World; this point of emphasis will become significant momentarily, but first we must acknowledge that the Reformers, from Calvin to the Synod of Dort and beyond, are in majority agreement on the teachings of the verses commonly cited as evidence against their tenant of limited atonement. I say “majority” because there was some disagreement over this very topic at the Synod of Dort, but obviously, as seen through the Canon of Dort, the understanding which we have discussed was adopted as the majority decision.

With the reformers themselves commenting properly on such verses, we have the evidence now to conclude that most persons who object to the idea of “limited atonement” have a misunderstanding of the reformer’s original meaning of this tenant; if those in opposition to such a doctrine continue to bring forth versus that the reformers themselves acknowledged and taught properly on, then the teachings of the reformers have not been rightly understood.

A key to properly understanding the reformed tenant of “limited atonement” is the fact that the appeasement of God’s wrath against the whole World is only a temporary appeasement; following the prior analogy of human reconciliation through a handshake, God’s hand of reconciliation, extended to the World through the sufficiency of Christ’s atoning work, His expiation, on the cross, will be pulled away from the World upon the second coming of Christ and the great white throne judgment (different eschatologies prescribe various timelines for such events, but such timelines are irrelevant to the points of our discussion). Jesus Himself teaches that “many many” will say to Him “Lord, Lord”, and He’ll respond “I never knew you”; we know

for certain that a great many persons will never reach out and grab God's hand of reconciliation, metaphorically speaking, which means that at the great white throne judgment God's wrath will indeed be poured out on them. At that judgment, there will no longer be appeasement for God's wrath on sin through Christ and many humans will indeed become the object of that wrath, which means that propitiatory work of Christ's death "for the sins of the World" can only be understood as: a) a temporary appeasement, and b) only *effective* for those who are saved (the elect). This is because in order to have our sins actually atoned for in Christ, we must grab ahold of Him by faith:

"Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;" - Romans 3:25 (KJV)

Romans 3:25 links the "propitiation" we have in Christ with "faith"; in order for Christ's work of atonement on the cross to be *effective* for any of the "World", they must grab ahold of Him by faith. To continue the prior analogy, they must meet His outstretched hand with their hand. Only through meeting God's hand in a divine handshake of faith is the atoning work of Christ made effective for any person on Earth, and His outstretched hand will not remain outstretched indefinitely. It is this reality that the reformers teach through their doctrine of limited atonement; that the effectiveness of Christ's propitiation for sin is *limited* to only those who will find such faith in Christ, the elect, just as Paul's teachings in Romans clarifies to us. Just as the Canon of Dort states directly, as previously cited, the reformers recognize that their is "complete ... satisfaction" of God's wrath against sin in the sacrifice of Christ, and it is "more than sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole World", but in simply keeping with all truths communicated to us in the whole of God's Word, such as in Romans 3:25, Christ's atoning work is only effective for those who find faith; the effectiveness of Christ's propitiatory work of atonement is *limited* to only those whose name will be found written in the book of life. Those whose name is not found written in the book of life will be identified according to their sins and God's wrath will be poured out on them; there is no atonement or appeasement of God's wrath for them in the end.

This reformed doctrine of "limited atonement" is clearly revealed in scripture as we have now seen, and it is also the product of biblical reasoning via the other reformed doctrines. This is the angle that some, such as Johnathan Edwards, America's premiere theologian, and a "Calvinist", take in his explanation of the doctrine of limited atonement. Paraphrasing for him, he takes the line of reasoning that since Christ knew from eternity's past which human's names were written in the book of life (the elect), when He came to complete His atoning working via the cross, He did not do so with the whole "World" in His heart, rather only the elect. We see this truth directly exemplified in the John 17:9 verse quoted previously under the "limited atonement" section of the "Some Scriptures of T.U.L.I.P" heading, which reads:

"I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine."

Christ Himself literally says that He doesn't even pray for "the world"; only those "which thou hast given me". He knew that His atoning work would not be effective for those who would not

find faith in Him, meaning there would be no benefit to them at all in the temporary appeasement of God's wrath against them through the offer of the Gospel message. Through such reasoning, we arrive at the exact same conclusions of "limited atonement" as argued by Calvin and the Canon of Dort; though Christ's propitiatory work is sufficient for all, and temporarily appeased God's wrath against the World in a temporal (time bound, earthly) sense, it is *limited* to only being effective for the elect; the one's for whom Christ prays. Jonathan Edwards's own words on the matter are seen as follows:

"Universal redemption must be denied in the very sense of Calvinists themselves, whether predestination is acknowledged or no, if we acknowledge that Christ knows all things. For if Christ certainly knows all things to come, he certainly knew, when he died, that there were such and such men that would never be the better for his death. And therefore, it was impossible that he should die with an intent to make them (particular persons) happy. For it is a right-down contradiction [to say that] he died with an intent to make them happy, when at the same time he knew they would not be happy-Predestination or no predestination, it is all one for that. This is all that Calvinists mean when they say that Christ did not die for all, that he did not die intending and designing that such and such particular persons should be the better for it; and that is evident to a demonstration. Now Arminians, when [they] say that Christ died for all, cannot mean, with any sense, that he died for all any otherwise than to give all an opportunity to be saved; and that, Calvinists themselves never denied. He did die for all in this sense; 'tis past all contradiction." - Jonathan Edwards [1722], The "Miscellanies": (Entry Nos. a-z, aa-zz, 1-500) (WJE Online Vol. 13) , Ed. Harry S. Stout, page 1 74

<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/adrianwarnock/2009/02/jonathan-edwards-on-limited-atonement/>

Given what we have now examined on this matter of limited atonement, there should remain no question as to the original intent of the reformers on the matter, nor any continued confusion. Those who argue against such doctrine of limited atonement either fail to understand its true meaning and teaching, or fail to consider all relevant scriptures when understanding verses such as John 3:16-17 and 1 John 2:2. QotQuestions.com, a generally very excellent website for finding biblical answers to theological questions, unfortunately displays the exact errors in understanding which we have now discussed; they take a "wooden" understanding of "limited atonement", meaning they apply the word "limited" in a strict manner to the word "atonement", arguing that the doctrine must imply that atonement is limited in its offering to the World, which as we have seen is dishonest to the Canon of Dort, Jonathan Edwards, and Calvin himself, whom they quote (this page on GotQuestions.com is the source for the Calvin citation used previously). In quoting Calvin, they display their own error in understanding of his words and the Canon of Dort, which we have shown to be in agreement.

This error of theirs is perpetuated through their handling of multiple verses, such as Romans 11:32, which indeed states God has "mercy on all"; through their errors and "wooden" interpretation of the title "limited atonement", they fail to acknowledge that God's extending of

His hand to the World in reconciliation, a doctrine which the reformers agree with, is indeed an extension of mercy, and undeserved grace to the World, consistent with the meaning of Romans 11:32. Having read this paper, it may be fruitful for the reader to examine for themselves this page, and see if they too can identify their errors in understanding:

<https://www.gotquestions.org/arguments-against-limited-atonement.html>

Canon of Dort from the Synod of Dort in 1618/1619 (all original tenants of T.U.L.I.P spelled out in individual articles):

<https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/confessions/canons-dort#toc-the-third-and-fourth-main-points-of-doctrine>

As an aside, sometimes the word “propitiation” is swapped with “expiation” in various commentaries and Bible versions; the RSV, MEV, and NIV use “expiation” or a variance of it, while most other translations use “propitiation”. The following links are helpful in understanding the nuance between the words. The R.C. Sproul explanation referenced previously is found in the Ligonier article:

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/two-important-words-good-friday-expiation-and-propitiation>
<http://helpmewithbiblestudy.org/2JesusChrist/AtonementExpiationVsPropitiation.aspx>

Does God Desire All To Be Saved? - Will of “desire” vs. Will of “decree”

There are several verses in the Bible which teach us that God in fact does desire “all men to be saved” and that He desires all “should come to repentance”:

“For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” - 1 Timothy 2:3-4

“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” - 2 Peter 3:9

On the surface, when held side-by-side with the verses and teachings we have walked through thus far, these verses can seem to stand in direct opposition to one another; how can God simultaneously desire all to be saved and yet only choose some? Indeed, to our minds which are still being renewed in the knowledge of God’s Word (Romans 12:2), this may seem like broken logic; however, a simple thought experiment can show us that it is not so, and rather it is our own minds and senses of logic that are warped and broken.

We only need to look at Christ and God’s plan from the foundation of the world to have Him be a propitiatory sacrifice for us that we see evidence of the aforementioned logic being correct. Scripture clearly teaches us that God the Father was pleased to “bruise” Jesus; in Isaiah 53:10 we read:

“Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand”

From these words and others in scripture, we know that it was God’s plan from the foundation of the Earth that Christ would die for our sins; God, in His infinite wisdom in mercy, decided the best way to communicate His love and grace and mercy was through the sacrifice of His Son for our sins and our subsequent faith in Him for salvation. So, this is all to say, we know that it was God’s desire that His Son should be “bruised” for our sins; not only was it His desire, but He was “pleased” in this desire.

We also know from the prior verses of Isaiah 53:1-9, as well as other scriptures, that God’s plan from eternity’s past for the manner of Christ’s sacrifice is that it would occur through man’s evil of crucifying Him for things He was not guilty of; the ultimate biblical injustice in other words. Christ was perfect and deserving of no punishment, and yet the Father was pleased to hand Him over via Judas to be unjustly convicted and condemned through the Jews; indeed, the Father was pleased to “bruise” Him through the evils of man. Here is where we should give great pause and ask a familiar question: how can God be pleased in desire to will something that goes directly against that which He has commanded? All the way from Genesis with Cain and Abel, through the laws handed to Moses, God has made it abundantly clear that murder is against His law; He in no way desires that any man should murder another, and yet, He willed this very thing to occur to His Son, and was even pleased to do so in a very real sense. God simultaneously does not desire that any should murder, and yet wills the murder of His Son, and in a very real sense is “pleased” in His desire to do so. Hopefully it is clear to see how this seemingly apparent contradiction parallels the one we discussed prior regarding God’s desires for all to be saved and His only choosing some.

Obviously the implication here is not that God in any way took pleasure in the actual act of murder that occurred to His Son; that was indeed the worst sin ever committed by man and God abhors it, because His revealed law tells us that His character of divinity abhors such acts of men. Yet, He was still pleased to will that such an act of men would occur against His Son, such that His Son could complete His atoning work for the sins of the elect and be exalted at His right hand; the Father was indeed pleased to offer His Son up as a sacrifice through a means of the ultimate injustice, or “pleased to bruise Him”, even though the mechanism of the bruising was one that God divinely abhors. What we are to see in this example is that God very much can be described as simultaneously having two wills; a “will of desire”, or a “will of command”, and also a “will of decree”, also known as “providence”.

In the former, we see the very real part of God’s character which does not desire murder, which does not desire any should perish, which does not desire any should sin, etc. etc. etc., and yet, in the latter we see the other very real part of God’s character, His sovereign control over all things, via which He wills sin to occur, such as in the murder of His Son, or in the use of Assyria as a “rod of anger” against Israel, whom He later punishes (the Assyrians that is) for having done evil against Israel (Isaiah 10). In fact, God had to will that every one of us would sin such that we would come to know the glories of His love and mercy through His Son! Simply stated,

in God, we see the truth that He can simultaneously say “Do not murder; I abhor such things”, and “according to my Will, you will commit murder”; in such a statement there can be said to be no injustice or evil on the part of God.

I will clarify quickly, though my words will be too few to give justice to the topic, that the words “you will commit murder”, I do not mean that God forces acts of our will; since God has “consigned” all to disobedience through the curse of sin as Romans 11:32 states, the acts of murder that stem from our wills are ours alone. He does not have to force or manufacture in us an act of the will to do evil, which would then implicate Him of evil Himself which cannot be; rather, through His sovereign ordering of all things, including the formation of our hearts, minds, and bodily faculties, He is able to create and order us pots such that providence instigates any act of our will that He needs to occur, but it occurs naturally according to the state of our wills which are dead in trespass in sin.

In the predestination of our formation in our mother’s womb, He does mold our qualities as pots such that our faculties lend us to walking in the paths of providence that He needs us to walk; an autistic child is planned and made very specifically by God for specific purposes in the lives of a community and parent which are directly predicated on the child having been born with autism according to God’s will; in this way, the physical structures of our bodies, our “vessels”, directly play a role in fulfilling His wise plans, which include evil. An autistic person, or a man with type A faculties of testosterone, are “naturally” more susceptible to certain sins or behavioral characteristics than are others. We come into this world as “depraved” pots, shaped and molded specifically for specific purposes of “honor” or “dishonor”; He needs not to do any work on our wills to find in us adulterous, murdering, theiving, hearts; that comes by way of the curse of sin. Though some may be given physical qualities that lend more readily to some sins over others, such as anger, such qualities and their interactions with the curse of sin are “natural” to us and not forced by God. He only needs to assume command and control over those hearts through providence, which includes the aforementioned formation of our qualities in our mother’s womb, and the influence of His “common grace” to steer and suppress such evils, as He did with Abimelech (Genesis 20:6). For a much more thorough and in depth treatment of this topic, please see “Freedom of the Will” by Johnathan Edwards.

Since such statements as “Do not murder; I abhor such things”, and “according to my Will, you will commit murder”, are directly supported by scriptures, we must work to conform our thinking and understanding around such realities. Indeed, there is a great many more things that could be said about this topic, but for the sake of brevity, I will conclude with saying that given this example, we should now at least see at a minimum how God “desiring all to be saved” is not in contradiction to the truths of His choosing only some to be saved. Though His “will of desire” is certainly that none should perish, His “will of decree” is that many will.

Another simple analogy that can help us with getting a better pallet of taste for these truths are the decisions that parents must make all the time in raising their children; a parent often is confronted with situations in which they desire one thing and yet “will” another. For example, many parents desire safety and security for their children; they do not want them to get hurt, and want to keep them protected so that they may live a fruitful life. At the same time, parents know

that they must hand their children off to their own responsibilities and decision making and into the hands of God; if not, the parent becomes a proverbial “helicopter” parent, preventing the growth and maturation of their children. In other words, while a parent may always “desire” safety and protection for their children; they simultaneously must “will” that they do things on their own and learn from their own mistakes.

At some point, a child must be trusted with the keys to the car; at some point, a child must be allowed to make their own decisions regarding the friends they hang out with; at some point, a child must be handed off to a spouse and trusted into their own covenant relationship. The desire for “safety” and “protection” never goes away, but the acts which parents “will” for their children, on the surface, may seem to go against such desires of safety and protection. Since this is only an analogy, in it we will likely find flaws if we try to extend it too far to fully explain God’s will of “desire” vs. His will of “decree”, but hopefully it gives us a very “real world” taste of how we act in such a similar manner to God regarding the existence of two “wills”; we of course are not fully sovereign over all things as He, though we do have great control over our children for some time.

For those who would like to climb higher into mountains of these theological realities, I would highly recommend the following PDF/ book from John Piper, called: “Does God Desire All To Be Saved” - <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/does-god-really-desire-all-to-be-saved>

In this writing, Piper dives further into unpacking the existence of these two “wills” in God, and in his writing you may find more solace and understanding than I have been able to provide in this paper. Given that he has already labored to expound upon such great truths, and also given that it was through his writing that I was aided in my ascension to these heights of theology, I feel it most appropriate to point you to his work. That, and it will also save me a great deal of time!

Clarity In Language

“For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air.” - 1 Corinthians 14:9 (KJV)

“So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air.” - 1 Corinthians 14:9 ESV

“As indicated by the title, Wesley's aim was very similar to that of Tyndale's translation, i.e. to make the New Testament comprehensible to the ordinary man of the time. After 140 years since the first publication of the AV the language had become archaic and Wesley's intention was to address the situation.” - <http://www.tyndale.org/tsj05/wolfe.html>

Scriptures teach us that trying to speak to others in a language that they do not use is as if we are speaking “into the air”; none of us text, email, or talk in Elizabethan english, nor do we study its vocabulary or grammatical systems in schools or churches. It is a language none of us use in our daily lives, and it uses a great many words, phraseologies, and grammar that we are

unfamiliar with. As such, the truths of scripture are greatly muddled and obfuscated in our trying to understand them in this language; it is indeed a great hypocrisy to advocate that person's must learn of God's revealed Word in a language that is not even being taught and practiced in the churches that advocate such usage. Even John Wesley, an ardent Arminian, all the way back in the 1700s, recognized the "archaic" nature of the language of the "Authorized Version", which was then only ~140 years old, and sought to make a translation "comprehensible to the ordinary man of the time." How much more inappropriate and "archaic" is it then that some modern American churches advocate the use of a version of the Bible rooted in a now 400 year old language that no one uses or speaks in?

It is therefore highly recommended that readers read John 6, Romans 8 - 11, and other relevant reformed passages in the ESV, NASB, or even NKJV translations; doing so might very well greatly help illuminate these truths we have discussed in this writing, especially for those who claim difficulty in seeing them. Though, reading other translations is not necessary to see that even the KJV teaches such reformed truths, as evidenced by the fact that this paper has used almost exclusively KJV citations. These truths are as equally present in the KJV as they are the original Greek and modern English translations. It is simply more in accordance with scripture that we read the scriptures in our own language and not that of 400 year old English. God certainly did a great work through the "authorized text" commissioned under King James, and it is a Bible version which we should have no hesitancy in referencing or reading when it benefits us; although such "benefit" must be judged in accordance with the commands of scripture as argued for previously.

The Lord teaches woe to those who would put a stumbling block before children (Matthew 18:6), and even adults who are new to the faith can sometimes barely handle the "milk" of the Word when spoken to them in their own language (1 Corinthians 3:12); children therefore require "milk" specially prepared and delivered to them in a manner even more suitable to their age and maturity, just like milk is warmed and fed to a baby in a bottle. Indeed, at best our children are spiritual infants needing special care in their feeding; therefore, to lay God's revealed Word before a child in a language which they will not speak, write, or be educated in and practice, is to place in an infant's hands and throat food prepared for an adult, on which they will inevitably choke, just as even adults do. Surely, causing an infant to choke by feeding it food which is not suitable to it is a matter of criminal negligence in the courts of God, if not active malicious evil depending on the scripturally enlightened state of those giving the food; such truth is based in rational thought, let alone the Word of God. If you would not choke your children with meat they cannot chew, why do you choke them spiritually with a language they will struggle to see God's truth through? In either case, feeding an infant such food is sin, and those who do so should repent and turn from doing so. Though there may be many arguments of good intention in doing so, good intentions do not make what is wrong, right.

If there be any question over the irrationality now highlighted in demanding the use of the KJV version, note that most, if not all, "KJV Only" adherents won't even use the New KJV (NKJV), a version based on the exact same "authorized text", but translated into more appropriate modern English. Fulfilling the great commission inherently involves translating the Bible to any and all

languages as required to propel the Gospel forward, which includes modern English. Apparently though, for the “KJV Only” crowd, the great commission was partially completed for them at the advent of the “authorized text”; now the World must bow to them and their use of Elizabethan English, though they themselves don’t even teach or use such a language. Most ironically, some KJV proponents tolerate the idea of translating the Bible into other languages, but just not modern English; given that other languages don’t even contain parallel grammatical structures and vocabularies such that the Elizabethan English could be accurately translated into said languages, the hypocrisy of such a position is unparalleled. What a great tyranny of weak consciences indeed; truly, this is what “KJV Only”-ism entails: tyranny over the liberty of conscience given to the saints in God’s Word (James 1:25, 2:12).