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## Scripture Alone

Daniel Elliott Jr.

There is an idea among Wesleyan theologians that is widely attributed to John Wesley but is not actually something that he taught. It is called the “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” and has been inappropriately used since its inception as an attempt to homogenize Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience into a collective authoritative source for the purpose of determining Christian doctrine.

However, Wesley never used the term *quadrilateral* nor made any attempt to conceptualize the combination of these four criteria into a specific theological proposition. This was something that happened nearly two centuries later by Methodist theologian Albert Outler, who shortly thereafter regretted uttering even the words “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” because of its widespread mischaracterization and misappropriation from what he intended among Methodist pastors, teachers, scholars, and theologians. In 1985, Outler confessed to an associate, “There is one phrase I wish I had never used: the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. It has created the wrong image in the minds of so

many people and, I am sure, will lead to all kinds of controversy.”

The “Outler Quadrilateral” is described by him as “a distinctive theological method, with Scripture as its preeminent norm but interfaced with tradition, reason and Christian experience as dynamic and interactive aids in the interpretation of the Word of God in Scripture.” In chapter three of Ray Dunning’s book, *Grace Faith & Holiness* in the first paragraph, he correctly explains how tradition, reason, and experience support the authority of Scripture but incorrectly implies that they have some lower level of authority themselves. The truth is they have no divine authority whatsoever and cannot be compared even to a lesser degree with the authority of Scripture. Tradition is nothing more than a mode of transmission. It has no more authority than a radio used by a commander to transmit orders to a soldier. It is the commander who has authority and his orders that carry the weight of his authority. The radio (tradition) is only useful to the degree that it is capable of transmitting

those orders clearly. A faulty radio which fails in that task is useless to both the commander and the soldier.

Human reason in this context is nothing more than our ability or inability (or unwillingness) to comprehend the message of God, while experience is simply how we respond. To carry the analogy of the commander and soldier further, reason is the soldier's ability to hear and understand the orders delivered by the commander while experience is what the soldier chooses to do with those orders. They are only authoritative in a self-appointed fashion but have no bearing on the natural consequence and/or disciplinary action that the soldier will experience if he chooses to ignore or disobey the orders of his commander. Likewise, if we choose our own reason and experience over the authority of God through Scripture, we will suffer a consequence that leaves us eternally separated from God and ultimately "thrown into the lake of fire" (Rev 20:15; John 15:6). We can choose reason and experience as authoritative for ourselves in our temporal existence, but we cannot escape or supersede the ultimate authority and declarations of God.

We see this played out in the story of original sin. The serpent came to Eve to attempt to deceive her into actually doubting, and ultimately violating God's word. She explained to the serpent (oral tradition) that God had commanded them to not eat from the tree of knowledge, but the serpent cleverly "reasoned" with her by first getting her to question what it was that God actually commanded. "Did God really say?" The serpent then outright lied to her by claiming that What God said would happen, wouldn't actually happen. "You won't die!" And then finally he got her to actually question God's motive. "God knows that your eyes will be opened." She observed that the fruit was beautiful and desir-

able, and having been convinced, she then reasoned within herself that it would be good to acquire the wisdom the serpent claimed she would gain. Having sinned in her heart, she followed through to act upon it by eating the fruit and sharing it with Adam (experience). The first humans, Adam and Eve, placed their own reasoning above God's word which led to sin and death for the entire world and all their children who came after them.

Tradition, reason, and experience are useful for discovering Christian doctrine, but only insofar as they reflect God's authority as revealed in Scripture. I believe Dunning does a fair job of explaining this when he identifies how the oral tradition of the Old Testament and the apostolic tradition of the New Testament were useful in carrying the message of God from "generation to generation" until they were written down. He then goes on to explain how reason, "while it cannot function as an independent source for theology," is useful "as a logical faculty enabling us to order the evidence of revelation," in order to "guard against the unbridled and illogical private interpretation of Scripture." When human reason is under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and confirmed by Scripture, it helps us to comprehend but does not determine God's will for our lives.

Likewise, experience as a means of understanding Christian theology is an unwieldy beast that requires godly restraint. The experience of being inspired by the Holy Spirit and choosing to respond appropriately to the self-revelation of God in Scripture expresses Christian doctrine but does not establish it. We humans, however, in our fallen state cannot resist declaring ourselves the rulers of our own lives. Dunning describes how liberal theology has "elevated experience to a primary role, all but making it the definitive source of theology."

This was not what Outler intended when he spoke of the quadrilateral. He did not intend for all experience to inform our theology and practice. He made a point of specifying that it was the Christian experience of the assurance of salvation and the witness and work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer that is considered useful, but not definitive in the development of the Christian life. Outler writes, “Christian experience adds nothing to the substance of Christian truth; its distinctive role is to energize the heart so as to enable the believer to speak and do the truth in love.”

Human experience apart from God leads us to choose what is contrary to his will and desire for us. When we elevate tradition, reason, and experience as sources of authority (even to a lesser degree), rather than simply useful tools, we will eventually find ourselves in opposition to God because of our deeply flawed self-focused sinful nature.

Scripture alone bears the mark of the authority of God whether it is delivered orally or written on the pages of a book. It is the message itself that is authoritative, and not the object or method of delivery. Neither are the means of interpretation, nor the choices we make authoritative in a divine sense. Jesus Christ is the living Word of God, and being

God himself possesses all divine authority, and it is the Holy Bible that bears his mark of authority. Scripture is akin to a letter written by a king and then wax-sealed with the king’s royal mark ready for delivery. This letter, the Bible, is the sole source of God’s authority here in our temporal existence for determining Christian doctrine; it does not share authority with tradition, reason, and experience. They are helpful as tools to interpret and implement God’s divine revelation in our own lives, but not authoritative.

Please permit me one final analogy: God is the destination; scripture is the map that tells us how to get there; tradition is the navigator that helps us read the map; reason is the vehicle we use to follow the map’s instructions; and experience is the road we travel to reach our final destination — an eternity with Christ, our Sovereign King.

*Daniel lives in Roseville California just east of Sacramento and serve as a lay minister at CenterPointe Church of the Nazarene in Woodland, CA. He also owns and manages a music store in Roseville called The Strum Shop.*

## **The Comprehensive Role of Confession in Christian Life**

Joseph D. McPherson

**I**t is often taught that the one condition for attaining entire sanctification is “total dedication” or “full consecration.” We can be sure that entire sanctification will not be realized without such a whole hearted commitment. It may surprise some, however, to learn that John Wesley totally dedicated himself to God thirteen years before his 1738 evangelical conversion on Aldersgate Street in London. Full

dedication to Christ must take place when seeking regeneration. Christ will not be our Savior without also being our Lord. What is the one ingredient too often missing as a necessary condition for the attainment of both justification and holiness of heart?

The Apostle John assures us that “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all*

*unrighteousness*" (1 John 1:9). Adam Clarke explains it as follows:

If, from a deep sense of our guilt, impurity, and helplessness, we humble ourselves before God, acknowledging our iniquity, his holiness, and our own utter helplessness, and implore mercy for his sake who has died for us: he is faithful, to forgive, "because to such he has promised mercy," as we see in Psalm 32:5 and Proverbs 28:13. He is not only faithful but "just, for Christ has died for us, and thus made an atonement to the Divine justice; so that God can now be just, and yet the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus."

The promise of this one verse goes even further. Upon the condition of confession, God has also promised to "cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Clarke again explains as follows: "Sin exists in the soul after two modes or forms: (1.) In guilt, which requires forgiveness or pardon. (2.) In pollution, which requires cleansing. Guilt, to be forgiven," says he, "must be confessed; and pollution, to be cleansed, must be also confessed. In order to find mercy, a man must know and feel himself to be a sinner, that he may fervently apply to God for pardon." To get a clean heart, "a man must know and feel its depravity, acknowledge and deplore it before God, in order to be fully sanctified."

"Few are pardoned," continues Clarke, "because they do not feel and confess their sins; and few are sanctified or cleansed from all sin, because they do not feel and confess their own sore, and the plague of their hearts." Clarke assures us that "As the blood of Jesus Christ, the merit of his passion and death, applied by faith, purges the conscience from all

dead works, so the same cleanses the heart from all unrighteousness. As all unrighteousness is sin," says he, "so he that is cleansed from all unrighteousness is cleansed from all sin. It is the birthright of every child of God to be cleansed from all sin, to keep himself unspotted from the world, and so to live as never more to offend his Maker."

Mr. Wesley, in his comments on 1 John 1:9, makes it clear that the promise in this verse must be understood as pertaining to entire sanctification as well as regeneration. When confession is made of the remains of sin in the believer's heart God promises to "cleanse [the seeker] from all unrighteousness." According to Wesley it means, "To purify from every kind and every degree of it."

Whereas repentance before justification requires a confession and forsaking of all acts of sin, confession of and "forsaking of all inward sin" is necessary for the attainment of entire sanctification. This, John Fletcher also strongly enforces in the following words:

Christian perfection implies a forsaking of all inward, as well as outward sin; and if true repentance is a grace *whereby we forsake sin*, it follows, that, to attain Christian perfection, we must so follow our lord's evangelical precept, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," as to leave no sin, no bosom sin, no indwelling sin *unrepented of, and of consequence, unforsaken*. He, whose heart is still full of indwelling sin, has no more truly repented of indwelling sin, than the man whose mouth is still defiled with filthy talking and jesting has truly repented of his ribaldry. The deeper our sorrow for, and detestation of indwelling sin

is, the more penitently do we confess the plague of our hearts; and when we properly confess it, we inherit the blessing promised in these words: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." To promote this deep repentance, consider how many spiritual evils still haunt the breast. Look into the inward "chamber of imagery," where assuming self love, surrounded by a multitude of vain thoughts, foolish desires, and wild imaginations, keeps her court. Grieve that your heart, which should be all flesh, is yet partly stone; and that your soul, which should be only a temple for the Holy Ghost, is yet so frequently turned into a den of thieves, a hole for the cockatrice, a nest for a brood of spiritual vipers,—for the remains of envy, jealousy, fretfulness, anger, pride, impatience, peevishness, formality, sloth, prejudice, bigotry, carnal confidence, evil shame, self righteousness, tormenting fears, uncharitable suspicions, idolatrous love, and I know not how many of the evils which form the retinue of hypocrisy and unbelief. Through grace detect these evils by a close attention to what passes in your own heart at all times, but especially in an hour of temptation. By frequent and deep confession, drag out all these abominations; these sins, which would not have Christ to reign alone over you, bring before him: place them in the light of his countenance; and (if you do it in faith) that light and the warmth of his love will kill them, as the light and heat of the sun kill the

worms which the plough turns up to the open air in a dry summer's day. [Fletcher, *Works*, 2:642-643]

It should be understood that the practice of confession ceases not with the attainment of entire sanctification or Christian perfection. The foremost leaders of early Methodism were undivided in their belief and conviction that the prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses," was meant by our Master to be consistently expressed by all believers, including those having attained the highest state of grace. "A person may be cleansed from all sinful tempers," says Wesley, "and yet need the atoning blood for negligences; for both words and actions, (as well as omissions) which are, in a sense, transgressions of the perfect law. And I believe no one is clear of these till he lays down this corruptible body." [Wesley, *Works*, 11:395-396]

Adam Clarke assures us that "When a man [at any state of spiritual progress] has any doubts whether he has grieved God's Spirit, and his mind feels troubled, it is much better for him to go immediately to God, and ask forgiveness, than to spend time in finding excuses for his conduct, or laboring to divest it of its seeming [departure from morality]" [Clarke's *Christian Theology*, 234-235].

Richard Watson, an early Methodist theologian, was aware of those who "alleged, that a person delivered from all inward and outward sin has no longer need to use the petition of the Lord's Prayer" wherein our Lord teaches us to say "forgive us our trespasses," so as to assume "he has no longer need for pardon." Watson quickly corrects such misguided logic by assuring us that "this petition is still relevant to the case of the entirely sanctified and the evangelically perfect, since neither the perfection of the first man nor that of angels is in question." He reminds us that al-

though the entirely sanctified is made perfect in love, he or she is still “rendered naturally weak and imperfect [in body and mind by the fall], and so liable to mistake and infirmity, as well as to defect in the degree of that absolute obedience and service which the law of God, never bent or lowered to human weakness, demands from all” [Watson, *Theological Institutes* 2:456-457].

John Fletcher assures us that “Though a perfect Christian does not trespass voluntarily, and break the law of love, yet he daily breaks the law of Adamic perfection through the imperfection of his bodily and mental powers, and he has frequently a deeper sense of these involuntary trespasses than many weak believers have of their voluntary breaches of the moral law.”

Mr. Fletcher continues by asserting that “Although a perfect Christian has a witness that his sins are now forgiven, in the court of his conscience, yet he ‘knows the terror of the Lord:’ he hastens to meet the awful day of God: he waits for the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the character of a righteous Judge.” For these stupendous reasons “he keeps an eye to the awful tribunal, before which he must soon ‘be justified or condemned by his words:’ he is conscious that his final justification is not yet come; and therefore he would think himself a monster of stupidity and pride, if, with an eye to his salvation in the great day, he scrupled saying to the end of life, ‘Forgive us our trespasses’” [Fletcher, *Works*, 2:502].

W. B. Pope, esteemed Methodist theologian, says that “The prayer which every member of the pilgrim [or true] church utters, ‘Forgive us our trespasses’ ... is not efficacious for those whose faith without works is dead; but for those whose faith worketh by love.”

It is interesting to note that far from supposing this prayer for forgiveness to be designed only for penitent, unregenerate sinners, an early church father by the name of Chrysostom declared: “This prayer for forgiveness belongs to believers. For the uninitiated could not call God Father” [Oden, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, IA: 136]. Another church father by the name of Cyprian agrees when assuring us that, “The new man, born again and restored to his God through grace, can say ‘Father’ at the beginning [of the prayer] for he has now begun to be a son.”

Cyprian goes a step further by emphasizing the need of a daily pleading for forgiveness. He stresses the fact that the child of God, though initially cleansed from past sins at the time of his or her conversion and baptism, must be continually washed and cleansed [Bercot, *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, 407; 449-450].

Finally, what can we say concerning the state of those who refuse to practice daily confession? What can we say concerning those who refuse or avoid reciting in its entirety the prayer our Lord taught us? One church father whose identity is left anonymous makes no apology for his conclusion that such are not to be considered Christ’s disciples [Oden, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, IA: 137].

We must conclude that the act of confession is to be practiced not only by seekers for justification and entire sanctification but by all true believers who desire to be continually washed and cleansed in the atoning blood of our Savior.

*Joe and his wife Margaret are members of the Nelson Street Wesleyan Church in Marion, Indiana. He has been researching early Methodism since 1961 and is a contributing editor.*

## The Connection Between Spiritual Freedom and Political Liberty

Vic Reasoner

**T**he nature of God is the basis of human freedom. To be created in his image means that he has shared his freedom with us. True freedom always implied more than one option. Love is not real unless it involves choice. When God created mankind, he put a forbidden tree in the garden. He wanted to provide us with the opportunity to choose to love him.

Before we sinned, somehow Satan himself also chose to rebel. At some point Satan tempted the first pair to eat of the forbidden fruit. He promised that our rebellion would result in true freedom. Instead, it resulted in bondage and the loss of privilege.

Across thousands of years, mankind individually and collectively lived in bondage. First Egypt, then Assyria, Babylon, the Medes and Persians, the Greeks and finally Romans all held the world under oppressive regimes. But at just the right time, Christ came. He came to set us free in every sense (Luke 4:18; Gal 5:1). While full salvation is God's greatest gift, that salvation includes freedom from the bondage of sin. Political freedom is a natural consequence of the gospel.

At first Christ's spiritual kingdom was itself brutally persecuted by the Roman Empire, but gradually salvation penetrated the darkness. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Cor 3:17). Gradually, the followers of Christ grew to the point they were able to influence society. The status of women was elevated. Slavery was abolished. Christians cared for the handicapped, built hospitals and orphanages, taught people to read, gave them an education, and raised the standard of living.

Too often, however, government was still corrupt. While Scripture does not necessarily

prescribe a particular form of government, the implication is that there should be liberty and justice for all. Corrupt leaders tended to appeal to a concept they abused — the divine right of kings. They claimed that God had appointed their family to rule and it was the duty of their subjects to obey them unconditionally. Especially, if those subjects were Christians, they obeyed God by obeying the king. But in most cases, the monarch, once established, had no further use for God. They continued to abuse their subjects with the justification that God willed it.

Eventually, Christians began to see that this concept of freedom worked both ways. If God gave them freedom, they could only give away that freedom voluntarily. I could forfeit some personal freedom in order to love my neighbor as myself. But it is not love unless it is voluntary. We should guard our freedom and be reluctant to barter it away. Once it has gone, it is hard to retrieve. More important, however, is that our freedom cannot be taken from us; we must choose to suspend it voluntarily. When freedom is taken from us by force that amounts to tyranny.

Government is no longer based on divine right but upon covenant. This was the concept under the Old Testament kings of Israel. The first act of a newly installed king was to write out the law of God as a reminder that he was under that law (Deut 17:18).

Moses expounded on the terms of the covenant in Deuteronomy 27-30. Joshua's authority was based upon his upholding of divine law. Samuel installed Saul as king and told the people they were to obey God, as well as their king (1 Sam 12:14). When Saul disobeyed God, he was replaced as king (1 Sam 15:22-23). David was established on the same

basis, as was Solomon (2 Chron 7:17-18). Elijah felt like he was the only one left still resisting, but he prophesied that dogs would eat Jezebel. He had to push back against false prophets who predicted victory for Ahaz.

Even heathen kings served according to God's good pleasure. This was true of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4:17) and Cyrus (Isa 45:1). Yet their authority was delegated and thus limited (Dan 2:47). No delegated power is unconditional. The goal of public officials should never be to flaunt their authority, but to require the minimum suspension of civil rights at the lowest possible level of government.

The more secular term is "social contract." This may have first begun with the Magna Carta as early as 1215. The theology was hammered out by Samuel Rutherford in 1644. His book *The Law Is King* really means that the law of God is above the king. Francis Schaeffer updated this book in *A Christian Manifesto* (1981). The implications are that God alone is sovereign, but he delegates authority to the family, the church, and the state. Here are the implications for political theory:

- The duty of civil leaders is to uphold God's law in society
- No leader has the authority to violate God's law. This means, in our case, that no president, governor, mayor, etc has the authority to tell the church or the home to do something contrary to God's Word.
- "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely," observed Lord Acton. Therefore, we must have decentralized power in order to preserve freedom. Beware of those who take our freedom under the explanation that it is in our best interest. Socialism assumes that mankind is inherently good, which is in direct contradiction to the consequences

of original sin and the doctrine of total depravity. Ronald Reagan explained, "Socialism only works in heaven where they don't need it, and in hell where they already have it."

- Centralized power in the hands of one person results in tyranny. Tyranny is satanic because it takes our God-given freedom. Leaders who mandate or decree actions contrary to God's Word have nullified their delegated authority and must be resisted.
- Rutherford explained that tyranny is satanic at its root and we are told to resist the devil (James 4:7). This does not imply that an elected official is actually the devil, but it does imply that he or she may be acting like the devil in a certain abridgement of freedom. It was on this basis that the American Colonies declared their independence from King George III.
- This resistance may involve civil disobedience in order to force the issue to go to court.

This concept of civil disobedience comes hard to compliant personalities who have been told their entire life that Christians are to be nice. Of course, we are not to be cantankerous, belligerent, threatening, and intimidating; but when civil order is turned into chaos and unelected bureaucrats issue unconstitutional mandates, Christians are not required to blindly comply. When bad men make the laws, good men break the laws. We do so prayerfully and under the fear of God, but we are at a crossroad in America. While, as Hebrews 12:4 says, we've not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood, the most tempting thing is not to resist at all. But we must not be forced to say what isn't true nor do that which violates our personal convictions.

Satan has always stolen liberty and he

must be resisted. To be told that we must agree with anarchists, barbarians, and thugs or they will burn our property to the ground is not liberation; it is tyranny. This did not work during the French Revolution.

*Fire in the Minds of Men*, 509 pages of text by James H. Billington (1980), covers the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century. The author demonstrates that the spread of revolutionary faith was not based on critical rational philosophy so much as occultism (magic) and romantic ideals. Such revolutionaries never agreed among themselves and often the disagreements were violent.

They were much more committed to emotional expressions, catch-phrase words (*verbal talisman* is the phrase Billington used), and occult symbols. Form was more important than substance. Music, and the opera, as well as journalism were the vehicles of expression. They saw themselves as the intelligencia or elite (the prophets) but often did not have any direct knowledge of the working class for which they were advocating. Their commitment was fanatical and out of the chaos and anarchy a new world order was to arise — like creation by the Big Bang. This was to be the violence to end all violence. They envisioned a “free” society without private property, levels of society, or sexes. Often this was thought to be perpetuated through continuous revolution in order to get back to nature.

This “utopia” was discussed in the cafes of Paris and perpetuated by the journalists. The main appeal is that they are anti-establishment. Slogans such as liberty, fraternity, and equality — originally from the French Revolution — were eventually replaced by nihilism, intelligentsia, populism, terrorism, and anarchism. Populism was never a fixed doctrine but a vague social ideal.

Karl Marx was simply one more elitist in

a long line who advocated for a utopia that by this time was termed *communism*. His *Communist Manifesto* went unnoticed until 1917. Marx describes the history of class struggles. He saw communism as a movement or destination, not a doctrine. He also dismisses all other rival socialist theories. His most distinctive feature was his single-minded focus on political power. However, it is based on an ethical double standard, an anti-democratic bias, and the absence of any but the most naive plans after a “successful” revolution.

Victor Davis Hanson has recently concluded that we are in a Jacobin Revolution of the sort that in 1793-94 nearly destroyed France. The Democratic Party vanished sometime in 2020. It was absorbed by hard-left ideologues. They were bent on radically altering, or hijacking, existing institutions to force radical, equality-of-result agendas that otherwise do not earn majority support. To implement such an unpopular program, the new left must radically alter our institutions. This revolution is run by elites and is a top-down operation. University deans all but prompt students to disrupt invited campus speakers. Words change their meanings. *Racist* now means “don’t dare object.” *Equity* is a synonym for bias. *Inclusion* ensures exclusion.

Still, to thoroughly erase America, these Jacobins must radically alter our customs and traditions. Names and dates had to be radically transformed. We are told the year 1619, not 1776, is now America’s birthdate. Statues are toppled, careers Trotskyized. Biological males suddenly have hijacked women’s sports — destroying five decades of women’s hard-won efforts to achieve equal treatment and respect in athletics.

These conspiracies will never ultimately succeed because God is sovereign and controls the destiny of history and because co-

conspirators seldom agree among themselves. Satan's house is always divided. Yet because God allows libertarian freedom of will he allows humanity to rebel and experience the consequences of their rebellion. We have to learn to think and pray and resist unconstitutional infringements upon liberty.

*Dr. Vic Reasoner is the director of publications for the Francis Asbury Society. He has served as general editor for The Arminian Magazine since 1995.*

## Simple Foreknowledge and Arminianism

Richard Clark

In my last article, "Open Theism and Arminianism," I briefly considered open theism, examining its standing as an Arminian theology and its strength as a doctrine. I argued that it is not clear that open theism is the only coherent position that an Arminian can hold, for understanding God's foreknowledge and its relationship to the future free choices of his creatures. I also explained that Arminians have historically affirmed God's foreknowledge of creatures' free decisions. Moreover, I contended that open theism struggles to make sense of some of the biblical data concerning the future predictions of the free actions of persons like Peter and Judas. I also summarily mentioned two positions, the simple foreknowledge and middle knowledge (Molinist) views, that Arminians have taken for understanding God's foreknowledge.

In this article and the one to follow, I will be attempting to concisely describe the strengths and weaknesses of these two options. I will try to be as fair as possible to these positions just as I did with open theism. My goal is not to convince anyone that they must prefer this alternative or the one to follow. Both simple foreknowledge and middle knowledge views, unlike open theism, have strong historical standings in the various Arminian traditions. In this piece, I would like

to consider the dominant Arminian view, simple foreknowledge.

Arminians believe that God has granted humanity a limited degree of genuine free will. By this, Arminians typically mean that when people consider a decision, they are truly able to make more than one choice. Christians also believe that God is all-knowing, that he knows every truth and believes no falsehoods. Yet, if creatures are free and God knows every truth including those that concern their future free decisions, then are they not fated to do what God knows that they will do? We have already considered the open theist answer to this problem, but how do most Arminians deal with this issue? The majority of Arminians argue that God simply has exhaustive foreknowledge of the future because that is what the Bible teaches. I have already noted that this assertion from scripture seems correct. Furthermore, they add, just because something *will* be the case does not mean that it *must* be the case, and to say otherwise seems to conflate *will* and *must*. Most Arminians maintain that God simply knows the future and, unlike open theists, they believe that he knows what free creatures *will* choose. Unlike middle knowledge views, they deny that God used his knowledge of how each possible future *would* play out, to choose which future to set in motion. Because only one future *will*

play out, many simple foreknowledge advocates contend that God does not know what free creatures *would* do if they were in different circumstances.

There are at least three ways that God is conceived of having simple foreknowledge. First, in most popular or lay theology, he is sometimes thought to look into the future and perceive what is there. A challenge to this view is to ask, "How does he see the future if the future has not happened yet?" The next two views indirectly attempt to answer this question. Second, perhaps a little oversimplified by me, there is the view that he knows what statements about the future are true and he can conceive of what *will* happen. In this second view, he does not, in any characteristically human way, perceive the future or "look" into it, but he knows the future in his mind. It is somewhat like if you knew every true statement about a barn that you are about to build, in such a case, you would be able to perfectly imagine it in your mind even though you are not, strictly speaking, perceiving it. Third, some say that since God created time, he is above and beyond it. In such a case, the past, present, and future are equally present to God, and he can perceive them. Some are troubled by the possible implications of this third view since it may suggest that it would make sense for us to pray for the soldiers fighting in the second world war because, for God, it is presently taking place. Furthermore, the notion of tenseless time is highly controversial and God's relationship to the changing universe that he created arguably entails that he is within time. How does God know tensed truths if everything is present to him? How does he act within time if he is outside of it?

Many, including other Arminians, have questioned what God's providence and predestination look like in simple foreknowledge theologies. It seems that in such views, God

simply considers what *will* happen and then ordains that it *will* happen. He does not consider what *would* happen if he were to ordain other circumstances, he simply ordains that what will be, will be. God's providence in the aforementioned views seems, to some, to be a sort of *que sera sera* attitude on God's part. God simply foreordains to happen what he knows *will* happen. Some Arminians have argued that such a doctrine of divine providence is weak compared to middle knowledge alternatives. Furthermore, since most theologians that affirm simple foreknowledge also deny that God has always known what free creatures *would* do in any set of circumstances, there is some question about how mere knowledge of what *will* happen is useful for God's providential planning. To see this ask yourself, "If God *only* has simple foreknowledge, could he take an action in year 1 to prevent the Pittsburgh Steelers from winning the Super Bowl in AD 1980?" For in simple foreknowledge views, the events that God foreknows *will* occur in the year 1980 are the actual occurrences that *will* happen. Imagine then that God does something in year 1 that makes what he foresees *will* happen, the victory of the Steelers, in the year 1980 be other than what he foresees. Now we seemingly have a contradiction, God knows in year 1 both that the Steelers *will* be victorious in the Super Bowl of 1980, and he has acted so that they *will* not be victorious at the same time and in the same way. To avoid this, it is contended that God must act in year 1 to change the future happenings of the year 1980 before he considers what *will* happen in 1980. So, it is argued, he cannot use his simple foreknowledge to providentially plan the year 1980. The conclusion is that simple foreknowledge of what *will* happen is not enough, by itself, for God to providentially guide the future. It is argued by some that God must have

also known what *would* be the case, in any possible set of circumstances, if divine providence is to amount to anything significant. For these reasons, some Arminians have embraced something like middle knowledge views.

Given the content of scripture, Arminians have admitted that God must, at the very least, have simple foreknowledge of what *will* be. So, what is to be concluded concerning Arminian simple foreknowledge views? Perhaps speculative alternatives to simple foreknowledge, which attempt to understand something as mysterious as how God knows what creatures will freely do in the future is a matter of trust. An appeal to mystery is

certainly problematic if it is done out of laziness, but it is sometimes necessary when an answer cannot be found. As Richard Watson expressed, in his *Theological Institutes*, concerning the mysterious nature of God's foreknowledge, "The subject is incomprehensible as to the *manner* in which the Divine Being foreknows future events of this or of any kind, even the greatest minds, which have applied themselves to such speculations, have felt and acknowledged. The fact that such a property exists in the Divine nature is, however, too clearly stated in Scripture to allow of any doubt in those who are disposed to submit to its authority."

*Richard Clark is a PhD candidate at the University of Manchester, through Nazarene Theological College and is a contributing editor.*

## Deception, False Thinking, and Forgiveness

Sherry L. Cahill

The mind is a remarkable part of the body. Many scholars suggest we have at least sixty thousand thoughts per day. The number is colossal. But be aware some thoughts are deceptive and untrue. Have you ever considered why deception and false thinking occur so easily? Why do we consent to invite deceptive and false thoughts into our minds? And what does all of this have to do with forgiveness?

Scripture is clear that Satan loves to deceive and place untrue thoughts in our minds. And to complicate matters more, Dallas Willard (2002) suggests that thoughts and feelings are closely connected. He states, "There is no choice that does not involve both thought and feeling" [Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 3].

Forgiveness is a choice or act that

requires feelings of remorse, and it also involves thought. In essence, we choose to forgive someone based on thoughts and feelings from our mind (hopefully stemming from the love of Christ in the heart).

Thus, we see the connection between thoughts, feelings, and forgiveness. But as we can see the connection between them, we also acknowledge how easily deception and false thinking can occur. For these reasons, we investigate deception, false thinking, and their connection to forgiveness.

It started with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Genesis 3:4-5 tell us how Satan deliberately told them that God's words were untrue. Satan knew that by getting Adam and Eve to think briefly about becoming more like God and recognizing good and evil, he could

deceive them into eating the fruit, disobeying God, and winning them to his side. I imagine Adam and Eve's conversation once the serpent planted the thought in their minds. Would it hurt to eat one fruit? Why would God put it there if he did not want them to eat it? How marvelous it would be to recognize good and evil!

Adam and Eve started to dwell on the deceptive thoughts, permitting them to penetrate their thinking, which soon became a mindset. They decide they want to be more like God and eat the fruit. Personal pride dominates Adam and Eve's decision, and sin is born in their hearts and all of humanity as they detach their focus from God, placing it on themselves. Remember, it all starts with considering thoughts from the evil one and then progresses to feelings and action.

Two scriptures seem fitting in this discussion. The first is when the apostle Paul addresses the Corinthian believers about deception and false thinking. He states, "But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ" (2 Cor 11:3). The second scripture is when Peter reminds believers to "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet 5:8). We must be attentive to our thoughts not allowing Satan to devour our minds.

If we begin to think about the deceptive thoughts planted in our minds by the evil one, our thoughts quickly turn inwardly, centering on ourselves, not Jesus. And remember, feelings are also connected. Sadly, the more we concentrate on ourselves, not God, we may even feel prideful or good, but we will experience a distance developing between our Savior and us, as it did for Adam and Eve. Thus, the need for humanity to seek God's forgive-

ness from a decision to be self-seeking developed. But Satan wants to keep us entangled in false thinking, a deceptive mind, and a distant relationship with God. If he can keep us entangled in our minds, he knows we cannot have both a servant's heart and a selfish one. He has trapped us with false thinking, just as he did with Adam and Eve.

I firmly believe that false thinking and deception can lead to egocentricity and often unforgiveness. Why is it so difficult to forgive someone who has offended me? It could be that my thinking originates in myself and not God. The results can be worrying about saving face (pride), what others might think of me (self-centeredness), and trying to avoid pain and embarrassment (feelings), a natural human response but not a godly one.

There have been numerous people I needed to forgive over my lifetime. Several were difficult to forgive because my thoughts focused on myself, not God. In essence, self-interest controlled my mind. Satan planted deceptive thoughts in my mind when I was young. He swayed me to think that I could not receive God's love, time, or forgiveness and that God had no time for me since more urgent needs existed worldwide. Deep down inside, I wanted to understand God's love and forgiveness. But my mind was overtaken by deceitful and false thinking and inward focus about how unworthy I was of God's attention and forgiveness. I continued to battle such thoughts and could not gain peace, but I eventually accepted the idea.

Fast forward several years later to the time I was researching the topics of forgiveness and reconciliation. God unquestionably spoke to me about the people I need to forgive. My initial response was defensive (a self-centered response). I said, "God, what do you mean I need to forgive people?" It disturbed me immensely since I was striving hard

to live a Christian life. But the Spirit reminded me of the many people I met over many years across the United States and Africa. I made a list of them, then asked myself if I needed to forgive each one. Emotions started to arise as I thought about some people. To my astonishment, I needed to forgive several people.

I was captivated by a desire to understand what biblical forgiveness meant. In my research, I discovered three biblical words for forgiveness: *apoluo*, which means we are setting something free; *aphiemi*, meaning that we release something; and *charizomai*, which indicates we are kind or polite to someone [William R. Domeris, "Biblical Perspectives on Forgiveness," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 54 (March 1986): 48-50].

All these meanings suggest a permanent act of forgiveness, not temporary. I realized that I did not forgive these people permanently. Could this be the answer for which I was searching? I found a burning desire to continue growing in him during my studies. And to do that, I knew I must understand God's love and forgiveness.

The Spirit spoke to me about several things. I discovered I had not permanently forgiven people in the biblical sense and was holding on to the pains. God awakened me to see that the priority of my life was myself, not him, and, with myself as a priority, it was impossible to forgive permanently. God also awakened me to see that I was living under false thinking and a deceptive mindset. He made it clear to me that I had been deceived by the evil one, and I was the focus of my life and ministry, not him. These things were disconcerting.

And then, I grasped the thought that "If Satan could deceive me into believing I cannot receive God's love, then I would never truly accept it in my heart or build a relationship with God. I would be stuck in the sense of

only understanding his love but not experiencing it. It would mean Satan could keep control of my heart as long as I kept this mindset" [Cahill, *Forgiveness*, 16]. I could never understand God's love and forgiveness or forgive others with such a mindset and self-focus. Satan deliberately tried to keep my mind deceived and thinking falsely about God. Something needed to change.

I was reminded of Ephesians 1:4, "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." I knew I was not blameless in God's sight because false thinking and deception had no place in his kingdom. God opened my mind and helped me recognize that he did love me. I immediately prayed, asking God to forgive me for such a mindset. He did, and then I went through my list and asked God to help me forgive each person who had offended me somehow. Instantaneously, I felt a load of bondage released from my body and mind. Do you see the correlation between false thinking, deception, and forgiveness?

Think of the Israelites. They got deceived into seeking things around them, turning their focus off God and placing it on what they wanted. It was cyclical. They follow God, then self-interest dominates, and they are preoccupied with sinful things around them. God warns them, they recognize their sin, repent, seek forgiveness, and God shows them mercy. Then they repeat the cycle. Am I any different? I have wandered around life, being self-centered instead of God-centered. I get sidetracked, become self-absorbed, and preoccupied with myself. All the while, I detach my focus from him and transfer it to myself.

The good news is that we do not have to live in a deceptive and false thinking mindset. God is teaching me to have a Christlike mind and how prayer, reading scripture, and meditating on him draw me near his heart allowing

him to renew my mind. He is teaching me the value of practicing his presence multiple times daily. Practicing spiritual disciplines transfers my heart and mind to be on God, not myself. God is teaching me to forgive others immediately instead of being entangled in bondage. Ultimately, God is teaching me how much he cares for me and offers forgiveness. But I could not have a teachable mind without first allowing God to remove the false thinking and deception I was experiencing.

We must ask if we allow a deceitful mind and false thinking to distract us from God and become self-absorbed. Satan tricks us into thinking that we are alright to hold on to thoughts and feelings and be unforgiving. But it is time we allow God to eradicate this false thinking and mindset. We need a reset, renewal, and transformation to occur. We must ask the Lord to “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me” and to “Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing

spirit” (Ps 51:10,12). As he does, we leave behind a life of false thinking and deception, and we can begin thinking more like Christ and forgive others.

We have discussed how Satan is good at deceiving us and creating false thinking. False thinking and deception prevent us from following God’s call and forgiving others. I pray that we do as Hebrews 12:1 says, “throw off” the distractions of this world and refocus our minds on God, not ourselves. But we must make daily choices about forgiving or living with false thinking and deception. We must decide if we will ask Christ to renew our minds daily. I pray that we do! And I pray we engage intimately with Jesus and refuse to live our lives based on false thinking or deceptive mindset.

*Sherry Cahill (DTh in Christian Management and Leadership), author of Forgiveness: Getting Beyond the Pain. Sherry and her husband, Thom, serve as missionaries with the Free Methodist World Missions. They work in Spiritual Formation and Leadership Development. You can follow them online at <https://cahillmission.org/>*

## **The Charge and Vision Remains**

Thom Cahill

*I look upon all the world as my parish; thus far I mean that, in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty, to declare unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation. This is the work which I know God has called me to. And sure I am that his blessing attends it. Great encouragement have I therefore to be faithful in fulfilling the work he hath given me to do. His servant I am, and as such I am employed (glory be to him) day and night in his service. I am employed according to the plain direction of his word, “As I have opportunity, doing good unto all men.” And his providence clearly concurs with his Word; which has disengaged me from all things else, that I might singly attend on this very thing, “and go about doing good.” — John Wesley*

**T**he phrase *all the world as my parish* is a phrase that John Wesley stated in his jour-

nal on June 11, 1739. It was in the context of his field preaching he was doing. Wesley de-

sired to minister to whoever would listen. And we know this is what he did. While Wesley focused on England and surrounding areas, he believed the gospel of Jesus Christ was available anywhere. Wesley ministered to many people, particularly the marginalized, through his writings, educational initiatives, practical ministry, outreach, and much more. When we read the works and writings of Wesley, we see his heart and passion for a local impact on the mission of God. Still, he also has the heart to see the gospel move beyond the boundaries of his country.

R. Jeffery Hiatt, states “Wesley had a plan in place that took in reaching those populations that claimed other religions as their faith” [“John Wesley’s Approach to Mission.” *The Asbury Journal* 68:1, 108].

In the article, Hiatt develops his theme to show that Wesley had a deep passion for people in his country and those of different faiths. Hiatt develops Wesley’s upbringing and the impact of his paternal grandfather and his mother as it relates to global missionary work. In Wesley’s journal on Thursday, March 24, 1785, he reflects on the mustard seed planted over fifty years prior and has grown. This statement is about the movement of the gospel of Christ through England, Ireland, North America, and beyond. Wesley would refer to other people groups like the “Moslems,” “Hindoos,” “Hootentots,” “Native Americans,” and the term “heathen,” with a desire for them to know the gospel of Jesus Christ. Wesley’s notes on Matthew 28:19 provides the following insights,

*Disciple all nations*—Make them my disciples. This includes the whole design of Christ’s commission. Baptizing and teaching are the two great branches of that general design. And these were to be determined by the

circumstances of things; which made it necessary in baptizing adult Jews or heathens, to teach them before they were baptized; in discipling their children, to baptize them before they were taught; as the Jewish children in all ages were first circumcised, and after taught to do all God had commanded them.

Wesley did not see his work reach “the ends of the earth” before the end of his life, but it was ever on his heart” [Hiatt, 118]. His passion for sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ worldwide was carried forward by those impacted by his teachings and ministry.

After Wesley died in 1791, the work of the Methodist movement continued, yet eventually divided for various reasons like policies, priorities, and other reasons. All the groups continued to emphasize sharing the gospel with the local communities, while only a few emphasized global outreach. The Methodist New Connexion (est. 1797), Primitive Methodist (est. 1811), and The Bible Christians (est. 1815) developed a Global missionary movement. The Methodist New Connexion began work in Ireland, Canada, and Australia in 1798 and China in 1859 [Rose, “The Methodist New Connexion, 1797-1907,” *Proceedings of the Wesleyan Historical Society* 47 (Oct 1990) 241-253].

The Primitive Methodists sent missionaries to the then-British colonies of North America in 1829, then to Canada in 1830. In 1844 work began in Australia and New Zealand. Missionaries went to Africa in 1870. They began in Equatorial Guinea and opened work in South Africa nine months later, followed by Zambia in 1893 and Nigeria in 1894 [Primitive Methodist Missionary Society Archives].

The Bible-Christian movement sent mis-

sionaries to Canada in 1845, Australia in 1850, New Zealand in 1878, and China in 1885. This brief list shows the impact of John Wesley and his teachings upon those who followed as it relates to global missions. The list can go on as one traces merging and new movements in the Wesleyan tradition.

The focus on Global Missions and their support is waning in the western world. Some of the reasons are that all the nations have heard, there are others to take up the charge, it's too costly, etc., so why do we need to continue to invest in it? Studies show that Christianity is growing in parts of the world. Yet, it also shows many areas where significant numbers of believers have yet to hear the good news of Jesus Christ. There are also movements of other beliefs that are growing.

Imagine being there with Jesus as related in Acts 1:8 when Jesus gives the charge to the disciples present to tell people about him in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. The charge given then, has been part of our Wesleyan heritage in the past.

It continues to be part of our heritage too. Even if we remove the Wesleyan heritage, it is still our charge given by Jesus Christ to reach all nations with the good news of Jesus Christ. May we be reminded of our biblical call to go forth. May the words of Wesley ring in our ears — “The World is my Parish.” Lord, help your church not to give up but to push forward, sharing our faith with those who need to hear it locally and globally for the glory of his kingdom.

*Thom, and his wife Sherry, serve as missionaries with the Free Methodist World Missions. They work in Spiritual Formation and Leadership Development. You can follow them online at <https://cahillmission.org/>*

## **The Five Points of Arminianism — Total Depravity**

Vinicio Couto

In the previous article, we mentioned some of how the five points of Arminianism were developed from a historical perspective. We also commented that there are common misconceptions about Arminian doctrine due to at least three problems: lack of verification of primary sources, common sense, and sometimes even intellectual dishonesty. In order to avoid these same mistakes, we will talk, in this short article, about the point of total depravity.

The term *total depravity* is recent. The earliest text I have found in which this expression is used is in a 1674 sermon, preached by William Alchorne at Mrs. Elizabeth Atwood's funeral. In an excerpt from this funeral hom-

ily, this Anglican minister explained that “nor . . . can we without him, live the life of glory” due to “total pollution and depravity which hath overspread Mankind,” so that “by his *Priestly office* hath made an atonement to God for us” and performed “our Reconciliation to him.”

In the eighteenth century, the expression was widely used in the theological universe by Anglicans, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists and Moravians, in addition to curious appearances in the artistic, philosophical and historiographical environment. In the last three cases, the use of the term has to do with the idea of immorality, illicit behavior. The use of this expression in

Jonathan Edwards, John Fletcher and John Wesley calls our attention. In Wesley's case, it is important to point out that he preferred the use of "original sin" and that it is rare his using of total depravity.

My hypothesis is that the term developed normally and parallel to the main confessions of faith, which, although they did not use the term, spoke of depravity in the sense of corruption. Thus, I believe that the term total depravity became popular throughout the eighteenth century, sometimes replacing and sometimes being interchangeable with the classic and Augustinian term "original sin."

The closest we find to the expression total depravity in confessional documents is in article 15 of the Belgian Confession, dated 1561, which deals with Original Sin. Right at the beginning, it says: "We believe that, through Adam's disobedience, original sin spread throughout the human race. This sin is a corruption of all human nature and a hereditary evil" (in the French text it is *corruption de toute la nature*).

Therefore, we do not know who coined the term *total depravity*. We do not find this expression in the works of Luther and Calvin, nor in the main exponents of the Protestant Reformation, and not even in the main confessions and creeds. However, the essential points of what was systematized as "total depravity" are all present in the literature of these icons of theology, because as we can see, the understanding of Total Depravity includes essentially 7 points: (1) spiritual death; (2) spiritual and social corruption; (3) the inherent evil of human beings; (4) the full extent of sinfulness; (5) the human inclination to sin; (6) the intensity of sinfulness; and (7) the universality of that corrupt nature.

In the history of theology, two people who denied these points were the monks Pelagius and John Cassian, who were refuted

by Augustine of Hippo. You have probably read somewhere, or heard in lectures and sermons, an unfounded and caricatured accusation that Arminius was a Pelagian or Semi-Pelagian. However, this statement is unfounded because Arminius himself made important statements against both positions in his works several times. Let's see some examples:

In his *Declaration of Sentiments*, Arminius mentions some councils that rebutted "Pelagius and his errors" and calls their ideas "false opinions." Later, he confirms that he has no difficulty in agreeing with the decrees established in the councils that rejected Pelagianism, 'especially in regard to those matters which are necessary to the establishment of grace in opposition to Pelagius and his errors.'

Arminius was aware of the Augustinian understanding of Pelagius' vision. He describes it this way:

The opinion of Pelagius appeared to St. Augustine to be this—"that man could fulfill the law of God by his own proffer strength and ability'; but with still 'greater facility by means of the grace of Christ."

Arminius, on the other hand, makes it clear that he does not agree with the Pelagian view, declaring that:

I have already most abundantly stated the great distance at which I stand from such a sentiment; in addition to which I now declare, that I account this sentiment of Pelagius to be heretical, and diametrically opposed to these words of Christ, "Without me ye can do nothing." (John xv. 5.).

For Arminius, this is not an open question for dialogue or secondary in the Christian faith. For him, Pelagius' opinion "is likewise very destructive, and inflicts a most grievous wound on the glory of Christ."

But it is not just Pelagius that Arminius disagreed with. He also took a stand against the proposal of John Cassian, whose understanding of human nature became known as Semi-Pelagianism, although he did not mention him directly. John Cassian said that the *imago Dei* was not totally affected by the Fall of Adam and that freedom still remained in his offspring, so that the *imago* was only sick, infirm, diseased, and the natural man was able to make spiritual decisions, having free will. He used this metaphor of illness dozens of times in his works.

Arminius, on the other hand, criticized this position in his *Public Disputation XI*, "On the free will of man and Its powers," when he declared that:

In this state, the free will of man towards the true good is not only wounded, maimed, infirm, bent, and weakened; but it is also imprisoned, destroyed, and lost,

so that

its powers are not only debilitated and useless unless they are assisted by grace, but it has no powers whatsoever except such as are excited by Divine grace. For Christ has said, "Without me ye can do nothing."

Since "original sin" would be a more appropriate term for Arminius' days, we can highlight his understanding of this doctrine here. In his *Missing Public Disputation XXXII*, entitled "De Peccato Originali," he

asserts that original sin "is the hereditary nature of our depravity and corruption," occurring "in all parts" of our being and that "first of all it makes us criminals," or subject to the wrath of God, and which "the Scriptures call the flesh." It is also a "substance that is part of our nature," that is, something intrinsic and inherent. Arminius recognized that original sin reached "the totality of the human being," not being limited only to "the appetites and senses," but reaching "all parts of the soul, such as the intellect and the will."

Another text to be highlighted is his *Public Disputation VII*, entitled "The first sin of the first man." The title is a clear allusion to the doctrine of original sin. He announced in the introduction to his lecture that he would address four sub-themes inherent in the subject at hand: "(1.) The sin itself. (2.) It causes. (3.) Its heinousness. (4.) Its effects."

He acknowledged this first sin to be the same as that the apostle Paul alludes to in Romans 5:12, and declared it to be a deliberate disobedience, carried out by the free will of Adam before the Fall, to the only law known and required of Adam, while in Eden.

Regarding the cause of the first sin, he enumerated two: one *immediate and near*, that is, the responsibility of Adam himself through his free choice and exercise of free will; and a *mediate and remote*, that is, the suggestive, lying, and tempting argumentation provided by Satan.

The heinousness of Adam's disobedience was severe and was nothing more than a contempt and a renunciation of the covenant with God and the obedience due to the Creator, a spiritual crime that altered the original beauty and innocence that God blessed his creation. However, very important for our study are the effects of the drop that he listed, which we can summarize as follows: (1) offense to the deity; (2) God's displeasure towards man manifested

in his wrath and chastisement; (3) human subjection to two deaths [i.e., physical and spiritual]; (4) loss of primitive, or original, righteousness and holiness; (5) race solidarity; (6) Adamic condition and that of his posterity, as alienated and deserving of wrath; and (7) inability of man to change himself from that condition by Christ's own effort and exclusivity for such a change.

The last effect of sin, that is, the human spiritual inability to self-transform and to take initiative in the search for God, can be seen in his *Declaration of Sentiments*:

This is my opinion concerning the free-will of man: In his primitive condition as he came out of the hands of his creator, man was endowed with such a portion of knowledge, holiness and power, as enabled him to understand, esteem, consider, will, and to perform the true good, according to the commandment delivered to him. Yet none of these acts could he do, except through the assistance of Divine Grace. But in his lapsed and sinful state, man is not capable, of and by himself, either to think, to will, or to do that which is really good; but it is necessary for him to be regenerated and renewed in his intellect, affections or will, and in all his powers, by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, that he may be qualified rightly to understand, esteem, consider, will, and perform whatever is truly good. When he is made a partaker of this regeneration or renovation, I consider that, since he is delivered from sin, he is capable of thinking, willing and doing that which is good, but yet not with-

out the continued aids of Divine Grace.

As we can see, Arminius described that, even before the Fall, Adam's free will was dependent on the grace of God. The post-lapsarian condition, however, is what rendered the first man without spiritual decision-making because that special grace was withdrawn from him and his offspring.

Thus Arminius testifies in his *Public Disputation XI*, "On the free will of man and Its powers:"

The mind of man, in this [fallen] state, is dark, destitute of the saving knowledge of God, and, according to the Apostle, incapable of those things which belong to the Spirit of God.

Only after regeneration, or new birth, can a human being, by grace, return to acting in a really good way. However, he was keen to point out that even being capable of this in the regenerated condition, such ability is not autonomous, but the fruit of God's grace, which is continuous in the believer's life. He described this centrality of divine grace in his *Declaration of Sentiments* calling it "perpetual assistance" and

continued aid of the Holy Spirit, according to which He acts upon and excites to good the man who has already been renewed, by infusing into him salutary cogitations, and by inspiring him with good desires, that he may thus actually will whatever is good.

Reading Arminius in his primary sources makes it clear that he was far removed from

either Pelagianism or Semi-Pelagianism. It is clear that his position is in line with that of Augustine and the other Reformers of his time and that he did not clash with the confessional document of his denomination, the Dutch Reformed Church, which followed the Belgian Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism. Our next approach will concern Arminius' perspective on election.

### **R.C. Sproul's *Chosen by God*, an Arminian Critical Response, Part 1**

John D. Wagner

Robert Charles "R.C." Sproul (1939-2017) was one of the leading Calvinist authors and prolific writers of the 20th and early 21st centuries. The founder of Ligonier Ministries and the "Renewing Your Mind" radio broadcast, he was the author of more than 100 books including quality works such as *Knowing Scripture*, *The Holiness of God*, and *Thy Brother's Keeper*.

Sproul is renowned for his ability to take complex theological doctrines and make them understandable to the lay Christian. One of his most well-known works is *Chosen by God*, a primer on the Calvinist position of predestination and all the points of TULIP theology. Published in 1986, this book is still selling well, such as on Amazon.com, and is considered a classic in its genre. The basic stated premise is that predestination "is for all biblical Christians," though the book goes beyond that one issue.

Classical Arminians completely accept that the Bible teaches election/ predestination but will be expressing many disagreements with Dr. Sproul and what he teaches in this book. We do agree with him, however, in saying "It is our duty to seek the correct view of predestination, lest we be guilty of distorting or ignoring the Word of God." This paper will cover multiple issues, but will not be in-depth with some, due to time constraints.

Sproul begins with a brief examination of the history of church theologians. He claims the "titans" of Christian theism are on his side and gives opposing lists for early and later periods, of Reformed and non-Reformed theologians, covering from about the 400s to the 1800s AD. The first list, on the Reformed side, names St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards. The "opposed" list has Pelagius, Jacob Arminius, Philip Melanchthon, John Wesley, and Charles Finney. He says, "It must look like I am trying to stack the deck." To some extent that is actually true. Although Pelagius and Finney are well known in church history, both are viewed as doctrinally aberrant in various ways. As Ali Bonner notes, even after the fall of Adam, "the idea that man's nature was essentially good was the cornerstone of Pelagius' argument."

And Finney, "denied that mankind has a sinful nature inherited from Adam. Rather, Finney said, our sinfulness is the result of moral choices made by each individual. Christ's death on the cross, according to Finney, was not a payment for sin as much as it was a demonstration that God was serious about keeping the Law." This denial of original sin and penal atonement are not positions supported by biblical Christians.

*Vinicius Couto (PhD Universidade Metodista de São Paulo, Brazil) is a contributing editor. He serves as Senior Pastor at 1st Church of the Nazarene in Vinhedo, São Paulo.*

Sproul does not acknowledge that Augustine (354-430) originated the doctrine of absolute predestination, which did not exist beforehand in church history. He further fails to acknowledge major church fathers prior to Augustine. Alister McGrath wrote, “The pre-Augustinian theological tradition is practically of one voice in asserting the freedom of the will.”

Paul Marston and Roger Forster detail that for approximately the first 300 years of the church, all the early church fathers (before Augustine in his debates with Pelagius) were essentially pre-Arminian. They provide quotes from sixteen very prominent early theologians, who could also be considered “titans” including Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Athenagoras, Origen, Jerome, Chrysostom, and even the early Augustine. A better choice than Pelagius would be Jerome, the renowned Bible translator, commentator and historian who is considered one of the four great “doctors” of the Western church. A better selection than Finney would be Andrew Murray, the prolific 19th-century pastor and theologian, who wrote more than 200 books and pamphlets.

Sproul also includes a more modern list of theologians on both sides. From the Reformed perspective, he lists Francis Schaeffer, Cornelius Van Til, Roger Nicole, James Boice and Philip Hughes. On the other side are C.S. Lewis, Norman Geisler, John Warwick Montgomery, Clark Pinnock and Billy Graham. He admits this is a “more balanced list.” But even here, the opposing side could have been improved. Though this book was written in the 1980s, Pinnock had by then converted his thinking to “free will theism,” that God does not have exhaustive foreknowledge, a position that is at the very least, serious error. And Billy Graham was an outstanding evangelist but is not typically thought of as a top-tier theologian. One much better choice for the “opposed” list would be the late I. Howard Marshall, an outstanding Wesleyan theologian and prolific author. Another would be Thomas C. Oden, also an internationally respected theologian.

Transitioning to doctrinal issues, Sproul emphasizes the sovereignty of God, writing, “That God in some sense foreordains whatever comes to pass is a necessary result of his sovereignty... If something comes to pass apart from his sovereign permission, then that which came to pass would frustrate his sovereignty.... All that means is that God must have allowed it [the entrance of sin into the world] to happen.”

Reflecting infralapsarianism, he is very cautious in his language with “in some sense” and “sovereign permission.” In more than one way, Sproul departs from Calvin himself. Calvin was quite straightforward on saying God *decreed* the Fall, writing: “God not only foresaw the fall of the first man, and in him the ruin of his descendants, *but also meted it out in accordance with his own decision.*” (emphasis added) He also wrote, “that Adam fell, not only by the permission of God, but by His very secret counsel and decree.”

Sproul also condemns the idea of positive-positive double predestination, also called equal ultimacy, even calling this (and God decreeing the Fall) “anti-Calvinism.” But statements written by Calvin went beyond “permission” and strongly suggest his doctrines were at least very close to the position Sproul condemns. Calvin wrote:

But...call to mind that the devil, and the whole train of the ungodly, are, in all directions, held in by the hand of God as with a bridle, so that they can neither conceive any mischief, nor plan what they have conceived, nor how much soever they may have planned, move a single finger to perpetrate, unless insofar as he permits, no, unless insofar as he commands; that they are not only bound by his fetters, but are even forced to do him service.

That the eternal predestination of God, by which he decreed, before the Fall of Adam, what should take place in the whole human race and *in every individual thereof*, was unalterably fixed and determined.

From this it is easy to conclude how foolish and frail is the support of divine justice afforded by the suggestion that evils come to be not by [God's] will, but merely by his permission. Of course, so far as they are evils, which men perpetrate with their evil mind, .... I admit that they are not pleasing to God. But it is a quite frivolous refuge to say that God otiosely [= idly] permits them, when Scripture shows Him not only willing *but the author of them*.

So here, Calvin is rejecting the “permission” advocated by Sproul. Calvinist theologian John Murray wrote, “The sovereign will of God as the highest and ultimate cause is just as rigorously posited [by Calvin] in reprobation as it is in election.” And Alister McGrath writes: “For Calvin, logical rigour demands that God actively chooses to redeem or to damn. God cannot be thought of as doing something by default. He is active and sovereign in his actions. Therefore, *God actively wills* the salvation of those who will be saved and the damnation of those who will not be saved.” (emphasis added)

Furthermore, Joel Hampton writes, “[R]eprobation in Calvin’s thought must have equal ultimacy with election because of Calvin’s view of foreknowledge. Contrary to Sproul, who contends that God made his decree of reprobation on the basis of his seeing man as fallen, Calvin predicates God’s foreknowledge on his decree. He states that ‘since he [God] foresees future events only by reason of the fact that he decreed that they take place, they vainly raise a quarrel over foreknowledge, when it is clear that all things take place rather by his determination and bidding.’”

In the convolutions of his theology, Calvin does acknowledge man’s responsibility in sinning as the “proximate cause” of the Fall. But Hampton makes the compelling analogy: “A good way to illustrate would be to consider a forest fire. We say that a cigarette started the fire, and we are correct because the burning embers of that cigarette ignited the underbrush, which in turn set the entire forest ablaze. Ultimately though, it is not the cigarette but the careless smoker who is to blame.”

Sproul also discusses the concept of God’s sovereignty and human freedom, saying, “Human freedom can never restrict the sovereignty of God... If God’s sovereignty is restricted by man’s freedom, then God is not sovereign. Man is sovereign.” Who among biblical theologians would argue otherwise (except for perhaps open theists)? All biblical Christians accept the sovereignty of God: “For God is the King of all the earth;...God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne.” (Ps 47:7-8) A better argument is that God in his sovereignty *allows* man a certain amount of freedom even when it defies his will, but God is still sovereign.

Look at Matthew 23:37-39: ““O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’” What is Christ’s emotional state here? He is upset. (This is further clarified in Luke 19: 41-44, in which Christ wept over Jerusalem.) What did he want? He wanted the Jews of Jerusalem to come to him. But they wouldn’t do so.

Also, Luke 7:30: “But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God’s purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.” They rejected God’s purpose for themselves! There are many similar verses in the Old Testament, such as Exod. 32:9, Isa. 65:12, Jer. 3:7-8, Ezek. 18:25-30, 20:8ff, Amos 4:1-10, etc.

On the issue of unregenerated man, Sproul writes, “If a person who is still in the flesh, who is not reborn by the power of the Holy Spirit, can incline or dispose himself to Christ, what good is rebirth?” However, Classical Arminians do not believe man can “incline or dispose himself” to Christ. Arminius wrote strongly of man being depraved and dead and that man needs a radical work of the Holy Spirit in his heart to come to Christ, but not via irresistible grace.

Sproul only slightly acknowledges the concept of prevenient grace — which empowers people to make a freewill decision — and then asks “Does the Bible teach such a doctrine of prevenient grace? If so, where?” He makes no effort to answer his own question but simply insists: “Without regeneration no one will come to Christ.”

In response, let’s recall John 16:8, saying that the *paraclete* “will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment in regard to sin because men do not believe in me.” The Greek for “convict” is *elenchō*, and “is a legal term” that involves creating “a moral and mental awareness of wrongdoing, the indictment of legal guilt beyond a reasonable doubt, and a willing admission of shame and guilt.” In this case, the Holy Spirit conducts that function in the human heart — but not in an irresistible manner. Other verses include Titus 2:11, “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.” John 1:9: “The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.” Also, John 12:32, in which Christ says, “When I am lifted up from the earth. I will draw all men to myself.” But this is also not irresistible. Describing prevenient grace, Thomas C. Oden writes:

Prevenient grace antecedes human responsiveness so as to prepare the soul for the effective hearing of the redeeming Word. This preceding grace draws persons closer to God, lessens their blindness to divine remedies, strengthens their will to accept revealed truth, and enables repentance. Only when sinners are assisted by prevenient grace can they begin to yield their hearts to cooperation with subsequent forms of grace....

Does scripture teach the concept of prevenient grace? There is no one passage that lays out a systematic definition of it, however, the concept becomes apparent throughout the overall tenor of scripture.

Oden continues with the points that prevenient grace is universal, convicts the nonbeliever, works in combination of the hearing of the word, is given generously, can be rejected and gives numerous Scriptural passages in support, such as: Titus 2:11, John 1:9, Acts 16:14; 16:29-30; 2:37; 17:26-27; Rom. 2:4; 8:32; 10:17; Matt. 23:37; John 5:34, 39, 40.

Sproul emphasizes the need of a nonbeliever to first be born again, i.e., regenerated, *before* he can do anything else in relationship with God. In his novel, *Thy Brother’s Keeper*, he describes irresistible grace as a “a holy rape of the soul.” Though this is a fictional story, one cannot imagine Sproul using that kind of phrase if he did not believe it.

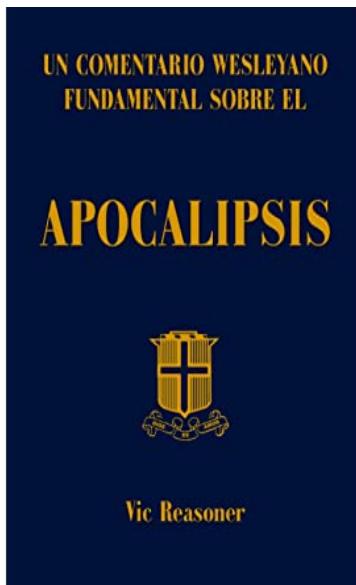
Sproul quotes certain Scriptures to support regeneration preceding faith — incorrectly, from the Arminian perspective. “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the

kingdom of God" (John 3:3). The crucial question here is what did Christ mean by *see*? Sproul implies it means understand. The Greek for "see" is *hōraō*. That word has many definitions depending on context. But the outstanding Greek scholar, A.T. Robertson says (for John 3:3) it means "to participate in it [the kingdom] as in Luke 9:27." F.F. Bruce has an end-times concept of this, saying, "To 'see the kingdom of God' meant to witness (and have a share in) the final consummation of God's rule, when it would be accepted and obeyed universally."

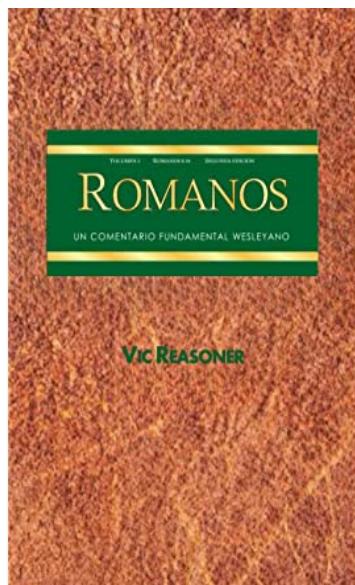
Sproul also quotes John 3:5, which says, "Unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." Of course you have to be born again by the Holy Spirit and through faith before you *enter* the kingdom. That does not support regeneration preceding faith.

*-to be continued*

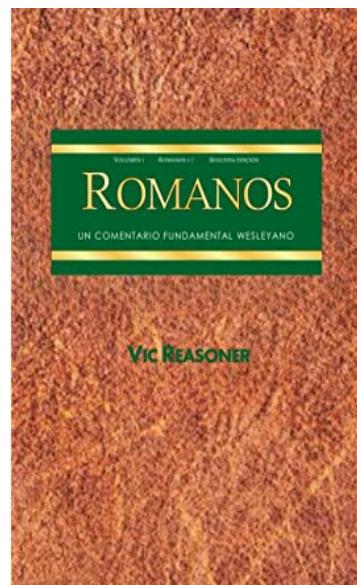
*John is a PhD student at Trinity Theological Seminary. He has edited four theological works: Redemption Redeemed: A Puritan Defense of Unlimited Atonement by John Goodwin, Freedom of the Will: A Wesleyan Response to Jonathan Edwards by Daniel Whedon, Arminius Speaks by James Arminius and Grace for All.*



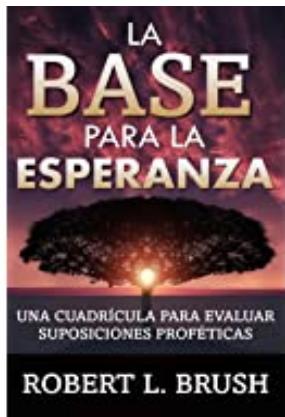
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