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THE WHITEFIELD PAPERS

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“Reformed Systematic Theology”

NOTES

on

Roderick O. Ford’s *Predestination: An Essay Towards A Reformed Methodist Theology*

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INTRODUCTION

The church founded by John Wesley (1703- 1791), Charles Wesley (1707-1788), George Whitefield (1714- 1770), and many others was an society of lay Anglicans (i.e., members of the Church of England) who were seeking righteousness and salvation. They were men and women who held the Gospel in very high regards and wished to comport with standards of holiness. Today, both Methodism and Anglicanism worldwide are facing schism and retrenchment, due in large measure, I believe, to secular humanism, materialism, and a steady drifting away from the orthodox teachings of Christ and the Early Church.¹ The Reformed

¹ The Early Church looms large in Protestant theology. It should be stated here that “Reformed Protestant Theology” was a reaction to the theology of the Roman Catholic Church as it existed during the mid-sixteenth- and seventeenth centuries. The Protestant Reformers wished to return to the true, authentic church—to the Early Church! This required the Protestant Reformers to review Roman Catholic theology, philosophy, and liturgy, and to cull out all of the papists’ false doctrines. Rev. Martin Luther led the way, but Rev. John Calvin seemed to have reached the pinnacle of reformed theological analysis and critic of Roman Catholicism in his path-breaking book, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. In general, the Protestant Reformers rejected all of the Roman Catholic councils that occurred after the Council of Chalcedon in the year 451, A.D. Thus, the Protestant Reformers accepted only four of the first nineteen ecumenical councils, as follows:

1. **First Council of Nicaea in 325**
2. **First Council of Constantinople in 381**
3. **Council of Ephesus in 431**
4. **Council of Chalcedon in 451**
5. Second Council of Constantinople in 553
6. Third Council of Constantinople from 680-681
7. Second Council of Nicaea in 787
8. Fourth Council of Constantinople in 869
9. First Lateran Council in 1123
10. Second Lateran Council in 1139
11. Third Lateran Council in 1179
12. Fourth Lateran Council in 1215
13. First Council of Lyons in 1245
14. Second Council of Lyons in 1274
15. Council of Vienne from 1311-1313
16. Council of Constance from 1414-1418
17. Council of Basle/ Ferrar/ Florence, 1431-1439
18. Fifth Lateran Council from 1512-1517
19. Council of Trent from 1545-1563

The Protestant Reformers also adopted the first three major creeds (i.e., the “Ecumenical Creeds”) of the Christian Church—the Nicene Creed of 325 A.D.; the Apostle’s Creed of 341 A.D.; and the Athanasian Creed (4th century, A.D.—which were promulgated during the period of the first four ecumenical councils, up through the beginning of the fifth century, A.D. The sixteenth-century Protestant Reformers thus rejected the other remaining fifteen ecumenical councils—from the Second Council of Constantinople up through the Council of Trent. For this reason, the Council of Trent (1545-1563), which had been held in response to the work and doctrines held by Martin Luther and other Reformers, was designed to formulate a response to the Protestant Reformation, which the Roman Catholics called the “Counter-Reformation.” It thus should here be noted that the Protestant Reformers largely embraced only the imminent Western and Eastern Catholic divines who lived before the year 500 A.D.—men such

Church, to a great degree, has not forgotten their roots in that Early Church, and I believe that this same Reformed/ Puritan tradition offers valuable solutions to various theological problems within mainline Methodism. For one thing, the Reformed/ Puritan conceptualization of the sovereignty of God's Providence may be one idea that modern-day Methodist churches (e.g., the Christian Methodist Church, the United Methodist Church, the Methodist Church of Britain, the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church) could learn from and incorporate into its own teachings.

But Reformed Methodist Theology (RMT) is not designed merely to incorporate Puritan/ Reformed doctrines into mainline Methodist doctrine and practice. RMT does not accept *carte blanche* every tenet of Calvinism without strict application of biblical principles. RMT is just as critical of Calvinism and Reformed theological practices as it is of certain liberal mainline Methodist practices within the United Methodist Church. For instance, RMT does not believe that all Calvinistic theological conclusions on predestination are biblically sound or are in alignment with the teachings of Christ. This paper sets forth the RMT position on predestination and explains why the supralapsarian Calvinist definition of predestination (e.g. John Calvin's *Institute of the Christian Religion*, Book III, Chapter 21 "Of the Eternal Election, By Which God has Predestined some to Salvation and Others to Destruction.") should be rejected.

as Jerome, Augustine, Theodore of Mopsuesitia and John Chrysostom—after which period (i.e., the fifth century, A.D.), according to the Protestant Reformers, the Western and Eastern Churches has spiraled out of control, and fallen into a downward spiritual decline of doctrinal heresy and internal corruption. The Protestant Reformers thus sought to extract the historical ancient church of the first century, A.D., from the grip of teachings of the Medieval papists. (Although Henry VIII's Church of England did not make so clean a break from Roman Catholic rituals and practices as did the Lutherans and the Calvinists).

SUMMARY

This essay argues that the Twenty-Five Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church should have included a separate article on “predestination,” because this doctrine is an important doctrine of the Early Church, first enunciated by the Apostle Paul and further expounded upon by Augustine of Hippo. Moreover, since the Methodist Church was originally a part of the Church of England, and claimed to espouse no new theological doctrine, Reformed Methodist Theology (RMT) espouses the idea that Methodism is an outgrowth of orthodox Anglicanism, which expresses its conceptualization of predestination at Article 17 of the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion (Church of England). This is the correct view of predestination, not that definition of predestination that is found in John Calvin’s Institute of the Christian Religion, Book III, Chapter 21 “Of the Eternal Election, By Which God has Predestined some to Salvation and Others to Destruction.” This paper explains why RMT rejects certain aspects of Calvinism while still holding to an orthodox view of predestination.

PART ONE Roderick Ford's *Predestination: An Essay Toward A Reformed Methodist Theology*

Discussion 1: Does Reformed Methodist Theology (RMT) embrace The Calvinist doctrine of "Total Depravity"?

No.

Reformed Methodist Theology does not embrace the theological doctrine of "total depravity."

The men and women within the world are not so "totally depraved" that they cannot discharge "the law of Christ."² Indeed, a man may *love God* and *love his neighbor* (Matthew 22: 36-40; Luke 10: 25-37) and thus achieve salvation, without holding an accurate or theologically-correct view of predestination.

I do not mean to say here that the doctrine of predestination is theologically untenable or unbiblical. RMT holds to the view that the "predestination" as defined by Article 17 in the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion (Church of England) is the correct view; together with the theology of Augustine of Hippo in *On Grace and Free Will* and *The City of God*.

Those Calvinists who hold that a man is heretic unless a man believes in the doctrine of unconditional election, the doctrine of assurance, and limited atonement are in error. The doctrine of predestination is not a sacrament; nor is it sacramental.

It is therefore the position of Reformed Methodist Theology (RMT) that holding an incorrect understanding of predestination does not defile the human soul or constitute "sin," and that it was a tragic mistake for the Arminian and Calvinist Christians (including Rev. John Wesley and Rev. George Whitefield) to have split up over this doctrine.³

² The Law of Christ is to "love ye one another" (John 15:12); to do justice and judgment (Genesis 18:18-19; Proverbs 21: 1-3); to judge not according to appearance but to judge righteous judgments (John 7:24); and to do justice, judgment, and equity (Proverbs 1:2-3).

³ For this reason, the Calvinists and Arminians should have been theologically reconciled centuries ago.

Discussion 2: Does Reformed Methodist Theology (RMT) consider “predestination” to be a mystery?

Yes.

The “doctrine of predestination” is a divine mystery, which means simply that God has not yet revealed all of its dimensions to human beings.

The expressed language within Article 17 of the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion says, “PREDESTINATION to Life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) he hath constantly decreed by his counsel *secret to us*...”

As such, human beings do great dishonor to God by prying too much into it with the objective of reducing the doctrine to a simple formula, or set of definite formulas, such as the “doctrine of irresistible grace” and “unconditional election.” Predestination falls within that category of sacred eternal truths that are simply beyond the capacity of human beings to comprehend—as if to say, God has not yet revealed to us this information.

Theologians who inquire into the doctrine of predestination must guard against the impiety of questioning God’s decision to establish the cosmic order in the manner in which he established it.

We reach this conclusion for the plain language in Romans 11: 25-33, where the Apostle Paul writes:

²⁵ For **I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery**, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

²⁶ And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:

²⁷ For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.

²⁸ As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the father's sakes.

²⁹ For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.

³⁰ For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief:

³¹ Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy.

³² For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.

³³ **O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!**

Discussion 3: Does Reformed Methodist Theology (RMT) hold that Jesus Christ taught “predestination”?

On the question of “election,” RMT holds that the explicit “words of Christ” outweigh all other passages of Scripture, including those of the Apostle Paul, as well as all other theologians—including Augustine of Hippo, Luther, Calvin and very many others.

RMT holds that the “Pauline doctrine of predestination”⁴ carries less weight than the actual words of Christ that explicitly set for the laws of justification and salvation.

Furthermore, RMT holds that Jesus Christ himself never explicitly taught the doctrine of predestination. For this reason, the doctrine of predestination should not be considered essential for the attainment of justification, sanctification, or salvation.

“Predestination” is not a “sacrament.” Nor is it “sacramental.” The doctrine of predestination contains no divine commandments for Christians.

And “predestination” is not so fundamental to the “law of Christ” or the law of love, that two well-meaning, honest Christians cannot give different interpretations to Paul’s words in Romans 8 and 9 different interpretations, and still hold office within a Protestant church.

Indeed, a man or woman may love God and love his or her neighbor (Matthew 22: 36-40; Luke 10: 25-37) and thus achieve salvation, without holding an accurate view of predestination.

⁴ Romans 8: 28-39.

Discussion 4: Does Reformed Methodist Theology (RMT) hold that Jesus Christ's teachings on "justification" and "sanctification" reject the doctrine of limited atonement?

Yes.

In fact, Jesus' teachings on "justification" answers several other questions about the Calvinist doctrine of predestination as well.

Jesus of Nazareth indeed taught us the true meaning of justification and sanctification through his arguments with the scribes and the Pharisees, and through the "Sermon on the Mount," the "Lord's Prayer," and many parables "Parables."⁵

⁵ The Parables of Christ set forth the "mysteries of the kingdom of God" through historical, fictional or hypothetical stories which Jesus himself used to explain complex theological and spiritual ideas. Reformed Methodist Theology (RMT) holds that the theology on Predestination must take into account the actual words of Christ on the question of justification and soteriology. The most noteworthy Parables include the following:

"Parable of the Wheat and the Tares" (Matt. 13: 24-30)

"Parable of the Unmerciful Servant" (Matt. 18: 23-35)

"Parable of the Rich Fool" (Luke 12: 15-21)

"Parable of the Wise and Foolish Builders" (Luke 6:46-49)

"Parable of the Watchful Steward" (Luke 12:35-40)

"Parable of the Faithful and Wise Servant" (Luke 12:42-48)

"Parable of the Unfruitful Fig Tree" (Luke 13: 6-9)

"Parable of the Sower of Seeds" (Matthew 13: 24-30)

"Parable of the Lost Sheep" (Matthew 18: 12-14)

"Parable of the Great Banquet" (Luke 14: 15-24)

"Parable of the Talents" (Luke 19: 12-27)

"Parable of the Wise and Wicked Servants" (Matthew 24: 45-51)

"Parable of the Ten Virgins" (Matthew 25: 1-13)

"Parable of the Wedding Banquet" (Matthew 22: 1-14)

RMT holds that the teachings of Jesus do not necessarily contradict the concept of predestination but his teachings also clearly do not support the doctrine of unconditional election and limited atonement.

Nor does the Apostle Paul's entire letter to the Romans, from which the Calvinist rely upon heavily, support the doctrines of limited atonement or unconditional election.

Discussion 5: Does Reformed Methodist Theology (RMT) agree with the Calvinist view that “through sheer pleasure” has decided who to save and who to condemn to hell?

No.

But we Reformed Methodists agree with our Calvinist brothers that our God is an all-powerful and all-knowing monarch of the cosmos. We are guided by our Anglican-Catholic traditions which purport that ...

God does always that which is fittest to be done, and that this fitness, whereof neither that presumptuous dogmatist was, nor any created being is, a competent judge, results from the various natures, and more various relations of things: so that, as creator of all systems by which these natures and relations are constituted, he prescribed to himself the rule, which he follows as governor of every system of being. In short, with reverence be it spoken, God is a monarch, yet not an arbitrary but a limited monarch, limited by the rule which infinite wisdom prescribes to infinite power. [Note 17. ‘A good example of the theory of universal laws of reason and natural law The universe operates according to laws which can be understood by the application of reason. The same is true of God; he is a reasonable deity who operates according to laws, not some capricious tyrant who exercises absolute arbitrary power.’⁶

Our God is not an arbitrary monarch, and his Word was not preached to us in vain, making known all manner of things concerning the kingdom of Heaven, foremost of which includes the doctrine of justification, salvation, and election. He is a foremost God of reason.

God is the supreme Law—“He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.” (Deuteronomy 32:4). And God is truth, and his Word is Christ.

For it is upon this foundation, that we Reformed Methodists calmly and respectfully redress certain aspects of the Calvinist doctrines of double predestination, unconditional election, irresistible grace, perseverance of the

⁶ Henry St. John (Viscount Bolingbroke), *The Idea of a Patriot King* (New York, N.Y.: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1965), p. 18.

saints⁷, and limited atonement.

⁷ See, e.g., Hebrews 6:6.

Discussion 6: What, if any, parts of John Calvin’s theology does Reformed Methodist Theology (RMT) hold that be valid?

One of our intellectual and spiritual founding fathers of Reformed Methodism, John Calvin (1509 - 1564), left all Protestant churches, and indeed the entire Christian world, a wealth of Christian theology and philosophy in his monumental work *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

My own personal respect and homage for Calvin’s life and work are reflected in my “Apostolate Papers.”⁸ There, I discussed in Appendix 1 of that paper several of Calvin’s major theological positions are the bedrock of Reformed Methodist Theology, including his views on:

1. The Christian polity and commonwealth;
2. The nature of free will;
3. The nature and essence of God;
4. The Holy Trinity;
5. God’s attribute of Justice;
6. The human conscience;
7. Natural law and equity;
8. Views on human slavery;
9. The liturgical idolatry within Roman Catholicism;
10. The church polity.⁹

I discussed Calvin’s influence upon the Church of England; the Protestant Reformation; and even the African American churches within the United States.

But we do not accept, without theological criticism, Calvin’s theology of “predestination,” at least as he presented it in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III, Chapter 21 (“Of the Eternal Election by which God has Predestinated some to Salvation, And others to Destruction.”)

⁸ Roderick O. Ford, “A History of the Anglican Church- Part XXIII, Section Three (John Calvin and Free Will)” *The Apostolate Papers*, Vol.1 (2018).

⁹ Id.

Discussion 7: What version of “predestination” does Reformed Methodist Theology (RMT) hold that be valid?

We Reformed Methodists instead accept that definition of “predestination” that is found in Article 17 of the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion (Church of England).

And, for the reasons explained below, RMT holds that Calvin’s understanding of “predestination” does not comport with Christ’s teachings in the “Sermon on the Mount,” the “Lord’s Prayer,” or his several “Parables.”

We disagree with our Reformed Christian brothers on certain aspects of predestination. Hence, Reformed Methodism does not believe that “Calvinism” should be associated exclusively with “predestination,” or that “Reformed” theology should be associated exclusively with “Calvinism.”

Accordingly, the Reformed Methodists reject certain components of Calvin’s theology on predestination.

First, in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III, Calvin says that God “does not adopt promiscuously the hope of salvation.” By this I take this phrase to mean that God does not offer to every human being the hope of salvation, because Calvin also says that God “gives to some what he denies to others.” For Calvin, the Scriptures provide ample proof of this: there is not a comprehensible reason for God’s “election,” because, as Calvin says, it is the “*mere pleasure of God* that salvation is *spontaneously offered* to some, while others have not access to it.” Does this square with the doctrine of Original Sin?¹⁰ Does this scheme comport with a God of law and reason? Does it square with a God who is perfect, right and just? Did Christ come to save all?¹¹

RMT holds that through Jesus Christ, a sentence of “death” upon mankind has been revoked, and not for a few, but for many—nay, for all of humanity! As the Apostle teaches us:

¹⁰ Original Sin was the worst kind of sin, for though Adam and Eve were perfect in every way, they willfully disobeyed God’s command: “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” (Genesis 2: 16-17). This, we believe, is God’s eternal decree: the wages and fruits of sin is death. Through a perfect man Adam “sin came into the world”—not through God’s arbitrary compulsion, but through Adam’s very own choice. That sin vitiated the members of the human flesh, and passed down from one generation to the next, and this is why the Apostle Paul describes “sin” as being inside of the flesh, and at constant war with the spirit. Does God now withhold his remedy for sin, which is faith in Christ, from sinners?

¹¹ Luke 19:10: “[f]or the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

¹⁴ Nevertheless **death reigned from Adam to Moses**, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come.

¹⁵ But not as the offence, **so also is the free gift**. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many.

¹⁶ And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification.

¹⁷ For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)

¹⁸ Therefore as **by the offence of one [i.e. Adam] judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one [i.e. Jesus Christ] the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.**

¹⁹ For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

²⁰ Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But **where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:**

²¹ That as sin hath reigned unto death, **even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.**

But our spiritual benefactor John Calvin says that Christ only promised salvation “to all that the Father has taken under his protection (John 10: 26).”

Moreover, Calvin makes clear that God’s foreknowledge of future events does not constitute the whole nature of predestination. But predestination also encompasses God’s actual control of those future events.

Calvin says, “[w]e, indeed, ascribe both prescience and predestination to God; but we say, that it is absurd to make the latter subordinate to the former....”

Calvin denies that God’s covenant with Abraham was meant to be extended to any other nation but Israel, out of which only a “remnant” would actually attain salvation.

“[W]hen God, after making a covenant of eternal life,” writes Calvin, “invites any people to himself, a special mode of election is in part understood so that he does not with promiscuous grace effectually elect all of them.”

And he writes, “the general election of the people [of Israel] is not always firmly ratified, readily presents itself—viz. that on those with whom God makes the covenant, he does not immediately bestow the Spirit of regeneration....”

God’s covenant with Israel was “restricted,” according to Calvin in this way: “[w]hen God ever and anon gathered his Church from among the sons of Abraham rather than from profane nations, he had respect of his covenant, which, when violated by the great body, he restricted to a few, that it might not entirely fail.” “For although adoption was deposited in the hand of Abraham, yet as many of his posterity were cut off as rotten members, in order that election may stand and be effectual.... Thus in the adoption of the family of Abraham, God gave them a liberal display of favor which he has denied to other.”

And, lastly, in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III, Calvin asserts that his view of predestination could not be denied by any Christian who “would be thought pious.”

Thus, Calvin’s firm theological position sets up the future divisions between the Calvinists and the followers of the Jacobus Arminus (i.e., the Remonstrants, the Arminians, and the Wesleyans).

RMT believes that many of Calvin’s followers are “ruled from the grave” by Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, and are prevented from having a differing theological viewpoint—simply because Calvin was a great theologian!¹²

Hence, due to this lack of freedom in theological thought, the Reformed

¹² Calvin himself had said that there was no room for a different belief about predestination and election, than his own systematic theology, as stated in the *Institutes*, upon the subject. Theologians with different views on predestination, such as Jacobus Arminus, could not be considered “pious.” Jacobus Arminus was shocked to learn that he was not allowed to render his own honest opinion on the doctrine of election. This Calvinistic inflexibility is a major problem—i.e., the lack of theological diversity of viewpoint on predestination—which the Calvinist churches worldwide should review.

Church split apart during the early 17th century. We believe that this was a mistake! But Congregationalism and the Baptist churches have enabled the Puritan faith to remain active and to flourish.

But, suffice it to say, Calvin's theological view of predestination, as stated in the *Institutes*, does not align with the plain teachings of Jesus of Nazareth on the subject of justification and election. See, e.g., John 3: 1-20.

Discussion 8: What specifically did Jesus teach or say that is a flat contradiction of Calvin’s version of “predestination”?

This question goes to the very heart of the matter.

In the words of Jesus of Nazareth himself, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16).

These words Jesus spoke to Nicodemus, the ruler of the Jews who came to him at night seeking information. “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God... [e]xcept a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” (John 3: 3,5).

Jesus went on to describe “every one that is born of the Spirit” to the “wind” which “blowethff where it listeth, and thou canst not tell whence it cometh, and wither it goeth.” (John 3:8).

Now, one might assume that by comparing the born-again person to the “wind,” that Jesus was saying that there is no rhyme or reason behind the “born-again” process, but that is not what he was saying.

I believe that what Jesus was saying was that, from the perspective of mortal human beings, God’s election of human beings would appear to work like the “wind” which we know not where it came or whither it goes.

For instance, Nicodemus was still confused about how the “born-again” process worked. And so, therefore, he asked Jesus, “[h]ow can these things be?” Jesus then explained the “born-again” process: there indeed was a rhyme and a reason. That reason could be explained by the example of Moses in the Old Testament (Numbers 21: 5-21):

⁵ And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.

⁶ And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.

⁷ Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people.

⁸ And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.

⁹ And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.

Here, the children of God became discouraged in the midst of pain, hardship, and difficulty while in the wilderness; and, as a result, they sinned by speaking against God.

When God sent fiery serpents to devour these sinners, many of them petitioned Moses for relief and remedy. It was then God informed Moses to make a serpent to be lifted up, whereby any person who had been bitten by the fiery serpent could look upon brass serpent and live.

And so, when speaking with Nicodemus, Jesus himself used this analogy of Scripture to say that Moses' "brass serpent" prefigured the "Son of Man," such that just as Moses had lifted up the "brass serpent," so too mould the "Son of Man" (i.e., Jesus Christ) be lifted up. (John 3: 14).

Now, at this point, there are two very important words in the Gospel of John, Chapter Three: "whosoever" and "world." Do these two words, utilized by Christ himself, mean that his atonement was made universal to every human being? I believe that, relying upon Reformed principles of hermeneutics, that the word "whosoever," in when interpreted within its Greek context, must mean "any one who believes," thus rendering Christ's offer of grace to everyone in the world—making it "universal" in nature.¹³

¹³ See, e.g. web-link: <https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/30931/whosoever-in-john-316>

"Does πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων refer to a specific class of people?"

"Not in the context, which provides no class but simply 'anyone who believes.' Rather, it is in the universality of the availability of His grace, that this doctrine finds its great power; in the fact that salvation is open to all men, for whom Christ died—everyone—if they would but accept it. 1 Jn 2:2; 2 Pet 2:1

My dear Calvinist brothers, who believe in limited atonement, must honestly interpret πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων or πᾶς ἡ πιστευόν for themselves. For after Jesus finishes explaining to Nicodemus that the just as Moses had lifted up the brass serpent, so must the Son of Man be lifted up: “That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:15).

Here, we note God’s precondition for receiving eternal life: first, “any person” (i.e., whosoever); second, “who believes”; and, third, shall not perish, but have eternal life.” And so, the law of Christ that governs salvation is firmly stated in John 3:15—whoever believes shall receive eternal life.

At this point, I am aware that my Calvinists brothers still do not believe that that their question or objections have been fully addressed, to wit, “whether God causes all believers to believe, and all unbelievers to not believe.”

Jesus’ own words do not lead to the Calvinistic conclusion that “God caused unbelievers to not believe.” For, indeed, in John 3:17, Jesus says, **“God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him**

“In fact, it’s clear that a general 'anyone who believes' is the only one consonant with the immediate context:

“John 3:1-5 (DRB) (emphasis and italics mine)

“And there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 2 This man came to Jesus by night, and said to him: Rabbi, we know that thou art come a teacher from God; for no man can do these signs which thou dost, unless God be with him. 3 Jesus answered, and said to him: Amen, amen I say to thee, unless a man be born again [same word for 'from above'], he cannot see the kingdom of God. 4 Nicodemus saith to him: How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born again? 5 Jesus answered: Amen, amen I say to thee, unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

“So this is speaking in general terms, since "a man" or "any" (τις—v. 5) never refers to a specific class of people without qualification such as here.

“It is in this context that Jesus distinguishes between the hypothetical believing man, who accepts the word and keeps it, Mt 13:8-9 (also general) and he who does not believe. Anyone (τις—v. 5). Mark 16:16 is the same teaching, except in the singular instead of plural. But doesn't grammatically or contextually change any meaning. It is in this universal spirit that Jesus says other things generally, such as 'he that endures to the end,' (Mt 24:13) which become meaningless as mere descriptions of smoe select few, and not warnings. And which would also contradict the explicit meaning given (Lk 21:19; Mt 10:22).

“In short, the elect are only those known to God and perhaps someone inspired by Him directly with some revelation. Only God knows who eventually endures to the end. From only God knows who truly believes and who will be saved. Only in this sense could we take warning passages as descriptive on God's part.

“For us they remain incentives and warnings and commands.”

might be saved.”

Now the word “**might**” indicates that there is a “possibility” for the “world” to be saved—not an unconditional certainty of eternal damnation and not an unconditional certainty of eternal salvation. So that the word “might” clearly reveals that through Christ’s death, resurrection, and atonement, that the whole “world” might possibly be saved.

Now, what is required is “belief” on the Son of God, as in the belief of Abraham—a belief that was counted unto Abraham for righteousness. (Genesis 15: 6; Romans 4:3, 5). No works are involved—this much Augustine, Luther, Calvin and all of the Reformed Protestants fully agree. But what is required, as affirmed in the words of Christ himself, is “belief.” (John 3: 15).

Do my Calvinist brothers maintain that God has prohibited unbelievers from believing? Or do they maintain that God has denied to them the ability to believe? Jesus himself seems to say the opposite, to wit: God has indeed given every person the ability and the power to believe and, as such, the reason for their condemnation is this: “that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov’d.” (John 3: 19-20).

And so, the means to belief in God is none other than the “light,” who is Christ. The reason which Christ himself gives as the motivation and reason for why persons do not believe, is not due to their lack of understanding or inability to understand, but because they “loved darkness.” (John 3:19). This “darkness” shields “evil deeds.” (John 3: 19-20).

This is the worldly conspiracy: evil deeds are being camouflaged as justice, righteousness, and goodness. It is one thing if there was no “light” to uncover such evil deeds, but quite another where “light” has now exposed the truth and yet, nevertheless, the world still rejects the “light” and cleaves to “darkness.” For this reason, Jesus explains why men shall receive eternal damnation: “he that believeth not is condemned already.” (John 3:18).

Thus, salvation as Christ describes it in John 3: 1-21 has a “deeds” component to it—what human beings actually do matters. Christ himself say, “[f]or every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his does should be reprov’d.” (John 3:20).

The world is not so “totally depraved” that it cannot know fact from fiction, falsehood from truth, or good from evil. See, e.g., Romans 1:17-32 (here Paul says that the whole world has access to natural reason and understanding and is therefore, “without excuse.” Rom. 1:20).

The reason why the world is condemned is because it believes not the “light” (i.e. Christ, truth)¹⁴ meaning that the world has rejected full knowledge of truth, even though the world has the means and the power to believe the “light.”

The reason why the world believes not the “light” is *not* because it has been *predestinated to unbelief*, but because of its many conflicts of interests in allowing evil deeds to continue, under the beautiful disguise of worldly “darkness” which camouflages those evil deeds.

The world has the “light”—but the world chooses not to believe the “light,” not because God, through his eternal power of predestination, has denied to certain individuals within the world the ability and the power to believe the “light,” but because those certain individuals within the world simply “loved darkness” (John 3:19) and these worldly individuals loved darkness because of their “evil deeds” (John 3: 19, 21)—for “this is the condemnation” (John 3:19). Is it possible for such worldly individuals as these, to be saved? Jesus himself says, “[f]or God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.” (John 3:17).

As Paul says in Romans 1: 17- 32, the Gentile “world” already had the light of reason and was therefore “without excuse.” But when Christ came, God’s light of truth shined even brighter than the light of reason—making truth crystal clear. Therefore, whole world now knows the Truth of God—whosoever believes in it shall have eternal life. And it should be noted here that Truth is “catholic.”

There is no “truth” for the secular state, and a separate “truth” for the church; there is no “truth” for our home domestic nation, and a separate “truth” for foreign nations. There are diversity of customs, traditions, and languages—but only one universal “truth.” That is why in the Apostle Paul’s Letter to the Romans, the great apostle to the Gentiles, allowed for much diversity within the church (Romans 14: 1-23), although there could be only one apostolic, holy, and universal “truth” of the gospel.

¹⁴ The Early Church—theologians such as Athanasius and Augustine of Hippo believed that Christ was logos and truth itself. This is the only way explain the salvation of men and women of faith—such as Abraham—who lived before the birth of Christ.

Discussion 9: How does RMT treat the “doctrine of election” and how does RMT’s theology differ from Calvin’s theology on this subject?

To answer this questions, we now must turn to the nature of “election.”

Our Calvinist brothers maintain that this “election” is “limited” to those whom God has elected from eternity.

But our Calvinist brothers ought to acknowledge that in John 3: 1-20, Christ himself, while speaking to Nicodemus, explained the means to salvation.

For they should also admit that becoming “born again” is the nature of “election.” And so, Jesus tells us that a person must be born of “water” and “Spirit” in order to enter into the Kingdom of God.

Further, as Jesus told Nicodemus, a man must “believe” in the Son of God in order to “have everlasting life.” (John 3:16). This explanation of Jesus Christ to Nicodemus is, in essence, what it truly means to be “elected.” And this is RMT’s understanding of “election” as well.

This “election,” then, occurs in the “heart” of individuals—conscience (inner chambers of reason between Good and Evil)!

Paul said “[f]or with the **heart** man believeth unto righteousness....” (Romans 10: 10).

Moses said, “[c]ircumcise therefore the foreskin of your **heart**, and be no more stiffnecked.” (Deuteronomy 10: 16).

And Jesus said, “[f]or out of the **heart** proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man....” (Matthew 15: 18-19).

Further Paul says in Romans 10: 10-13:

For with the **heart** man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

This turning of the heart is therefore the subject matter of election within Calvinist theology.

The Calvinist say that “only God” effectuates such a change within the heart—at God’s own choosing, and at God’s own pleasure. RMT disagrees.

In Romans 10: 10-13, Paul’s word “whosoever” is followed by the expressions “no difference between the Jew and the Greek” and “the same Lord over all.” So that “all that call upon him” shall have the “election.” See, also, Genesis 4: 26 (“... and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the LORD.”)

But the point to be made here is that Christ’s atonement is offered to everyone, and that everyone had the power to accept this grace—though not everyone will. See, e.g., “Parable of the Sheep and the Goat,” Matthew 25: 31-46. Paul says that the “preacher” is necessary in this process of “election” (Romans 10: 14-15), because “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” (Romans 10: 17).

This preaching of the Word of God to the Gentiles is how God “was made manifest unto them that asked not after me.” (Romans 10:20). The Gentiles would find God through Christ, whereas the Jews, who kept the Mosaic Law, would not. (Romans 10: 19-21).

And so, to all the world the Gospel is to be preached—not that all would exercise their power of election, but that some, if not most, would certainly exercise that “free gift” of election.

Does the Gentile Christian have any advantage over the Jew? No, according to Paul, since the Jews have not been caste away (Romans 11: 1-3, 27-33). In fact, both Jew and Gentile in the same boat, as Paul writes:

As concerning the gospel, [the Jews] are enemies for your sakes: but *as touching the election*, they are beloved for the father's sakes.

For the *gifts and calling of God* are without repentance.

For as [the Gentiles] in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief:

Even so have [the Jews] also now not believed, that through [the Gentile's] mercy [the Jews] also may obtain mercy.

For God hath concluded [both Jew and Gentile] all in unbelief, **that he might have mercy upon all.**

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

There, the Calvinistic doctrine of “unconditional” election, “irresistible grace,” and “double predestination” *must give way* to the plain language of Pauline Scripture—for God has clearly deemed “all in unbelief” (i.e., reprobate) but, nevertheless, God “might have mercy upon all.” (Romans 11: 30-32). God’s grace is, therefore, “universal,” because the word “whosoever” is universal. (John 3: 1-20).

Discussion 10: How does RMT treat God's foreknowledge within its Theological understanding of predestination?

This question is at the heart of Christian theology?

The Calvinist argument goes like this: if God sees everything in advance, or knows the end from the beginning, and is all powerful and just, then “double-predestination” is theologically sound. God has made some for eternal life and others for eternal damnation.

The Calvinists' emphasis upon God's prescience and sovereignty is laudable, since God is indeed all knowing and all powerful.

Calvinist teaching on this point reflects the plain language of the Sacred Scripture.

But God's discharge of his omnipotence and omniscience is beyond our complete understanding.

The problem of election (whether limited or universal) is a theological “mystery” which Paul has correctly described as follows: “For **I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery...** For God hath concluded them all in unbelief [i.e. “universal reprobation”], that he might have mercy upon all” [i.e., “universal atonement”]. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” Romans 11: 25, 32.

And so, RMT has concluded that the doctrine of predestination, as stated in Article 17 of the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion (Church of England) represents God's foreknowledge—a dimension that is secret to human beings and thus presents itself as a mystery to us.

That this mysterious truth about God's nature (i.e., God's prescience and omnipotence) was made a matter of theological controversy was a tragedy and a mistake from within the Reformed churches.

It is the goal of RMT to bridge these theological divides.

Discussion 11: Why did Rev. John Wesley omit the doctrine of predestination in the 25 articles of religion for the Methodist Church?

Rev. Wesley did not include the doctrine of predestination in the Twenty-Five Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church largely because “predestination” is not an essential doctrine for justification, sanctification, and salvation.

Moreover, it was obvious to Rev. Wesley that “predestination” was both controversial and difficult to understand, and thus likely to divide the young Methodist Church of America and Britain.

Since predestination is an ancient doctrine of the Early Church, RMT takes a different viewpoint: an “Article on Predestination” should be made an expressed part of the Methodist Church articles of religion, linking it to the Church of England and to the theology of Early Church theologians.

This “Methodist” definition of predestination may be copied verbatim from the expressed language of Article 17 of the Thirty-Nine Articles (Church of England), with a specific reference to Augustine of Hippo’s *On Grace and Free Will* and *The City of God*.

CONCLUSION

The *supralapsarian* Calvinist view of predestination is not the theological viewpoint on predestination that is maintained within Reformed Methodist Theology (RMT).

RMT's position on predestination should be construed from five important pillars upon which its foundation rests:

First, the actual words of Christ (e.g., the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6: 6-13) and the Parables of Christ) are the primary foundation upon which all other theological interpretations on predestination shall be judged;

Second, the biblical references in Romans Eight and Nine are next in line of importance, together with the entire text of the Sacred Scriptures;

Third, the writings of Augustine of Hippo are third in line of importance, and nearly equal in weight to that of St. Paul. The reason that Augustine stands alone and above all other theologians is due to his antiquity and great weight of his theology as a Father of the Western Church.

Fourth, the definition of "predestination" that is found in Article 17 of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England is fourth in line of importance; and,

Fifth, the writings of all other theologians—Calvin, Luther, Wesley, Whitefield, and many others—carry equal weight.

As this paper has fully set forth, the "words of Christ"—which are far superior to all others—leave us with only one reasonable and biblically-sound conclusion: the *supralapsarian* Calvinist view of double-predestination, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and unconditional election have no merit within RMT.

THE END

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APPENDIX A

St. Augustine of Hippo on Predestination— A Primer for Calvinist and Wesleyan-Arminian Theologians

by
Roderick O. Ford, J.D., D.D., Litt.D.

The Thirty Nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England embraces a theological doctrine of predestination which focuses on God’s eternal purpose that all mankind might accept the covenant of everlasting salvation (i.e. “general or universal atonement,” but which only some of mankind—whom God foreknew from the foundations of the world—would actually accept that offer of salvation.¹⁵ God’s foreknowledge, however, is “secret to us,” so that no mortal human being can know who will, or who will not, attain this everlasting salvation. Mankind’s lack of knowledge of those persons whom God has called or elected, reinforces the duty of humility, and being nonjudgmental of the spiritual sanctity of other human beings. Only God’s grace is implied in predestination, and not the good works of human beings; such that those human beings who lack the desire, inspiration, and motivation to do good works, or to accept the covenant of everlasting salvation, are

¹⁵ **CHURCH OF ENGLAND 39 ARTICLES OF RELIGION: Article XVII, “Of Predestination and Election”**

PREDESTINATION to Life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) he hath constantly decreed by his counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour. Wherefore, they which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God be called according to God's purpose by his Spirit working in due season: they through Grace obey the calling: they be justified freely: they be made sons of God by adoption: they be made like the image of his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ: they walk religiously in good works, and at length, by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity.

As the godly consideration of Predestination, and our Election in Christ, is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons, and such as feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh, and their earthly members, and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things, as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal Salvation to be enjoyed through Christ, as because it doth fervently kindle their love towards God: So, for curious and carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God's Predestination, is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the Devil doth thrust them either into desperation, or into wretchedness of most unclean living, no less perilous than desperation.

Furthermore, we must receive God's promises in such wise, as they be generally set forth to us in holy Scripture: and, in our doings, that Will of God is to be followed, which we have expressly declared unto us in the Word of God.

tragically doomed to everlasting punishment.

The Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647 also embrace a doctrine of predestination which embrace the theological idea of “limited” atonement, stating those persons—and only those persons—who are predestinated unto Salvation are those whom God hath chosen from the foundation of the world.¹⁶

When we consider the “mind of God,” we approach incomprehensible infinity and eternity; for in human affairs and events, God knows the end from the beginning, while simultaneously maintaining his omnipotence. Hence, the Calvinist doctrine of predestination is suggested with this conceptualization of God’s Omniscience and Divine Providence. God has perfect foreknowledge and perfect omniscience, as St. Augustine once described this theological concept in *Confessions*, where he says:

I am about to repeat a psalm that I know. Before I begin, my attention encompasses the whole, but once I have begun, as much of it as becomes past while I speak is still stretched out in my memory. The span of my action is divided between my memory, which contains what I have repeated, and my expectation, which contains what I am about to repeat. Yet my attention is continually present with me, and through it what was future is carried over so that it becomes past. The more this is done and repeated, the more the memory is enlarged—and expectations is shortened—until the whole expectation is exhausted. Then the whole action is ended and passed into memory. And what takes place in the entire psalm takes place also in each individual part of it and in each individual syllable. This also holds in even longer action of which that psalm is only a portion. The same holds in the whole of human life, of which all the actions of human beings are parts. The same hold in the whole age of the ‘sons of men,’ of which all human lives are parts....

¹⁶ WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH (1647) Chapter X. Of Effectual Calling.

“I. All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, **and those only**, He is pleased in His appointed and accepted time effectually to call,(a) by His Word and Spirit,(b) out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ;(c) enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God,(d) taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them a heart of flesh;(e) renewing their wills, and, by His almighty power determining them to that which is good,(f) and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ:(g) yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace.(h)”

Surely, if there is a mind that so greatly abounds in knowledge and foreknowledge, to which all things past and future are as well known as one psalm is well known to me, that mind would be an exceeding marvel and altogether astonishing. For whatever is past and whatever is yet to come would be no more concealed from him than the past and future of that psalm were hidden from me when I was chanting it: how much of it had been sung from the beginning and what and how much still remained till the end.

But far be it from you, creator of the universe, and creator of our souls and bodies—far be it from you that you should merely know all things past and future. Far, far more wonderfully, and far more mysteriously you know them. For it is not as the feelings of one singing familiar songs, or hearing a familiar song in which, because of his expectation of words still to come and his remembrance of those that are past, his feelings are varied and his senses are divided. This is not the way that anything happens to you, who are unchangeably eternal, that is, the truly eternal creator of minds. As in the beginning you knew both the heaven and the earth without any change in your knowledge, so you made heaven and earth in their beginnings without any division in your action. Let him who understands this confess to you, and let him who does not understand also confess to you! Exalted as you are, still the humble in heart are your dwelling place! For you lift them who are cast down and they fall not for whom you are the most high.¹⁷

But because God is omnipotent does not necessary follow that he is unable to create voluntary wills in human beings, while simultaneously maintaining his foreknowledge as to how human beings will exercise their voluntary wills. Augustine of Hippo says:

But it does not follow that, though there is for God a certain order of all causes, there must therefore be nothing depending on the free exercise of our own wills, for our wills themselves are included in that order of causes which is certain to God, and is embraced by His foreknowledge, for human wills are also causes of human actions; and He who foreknew all the cause of things would certainly among those causes not have been ignorant of our wills.¹⁸

¹⁷ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 204.

¹⁸ St. Augustine, *The City of God* (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), pp. 154-155.

Therefore, at least for Augustine of Hippo, these two ideals—God’s omnipotence and Man’s voluntary will—do not contradict each other. For, as Augustine of Hippo says, in *The City of God*, predestination is an immutable law of eternity, whereby a universal law of sin (reprobation), grace and salvation reigns unchangeable and supreme:

This race we have distributed into two parts, the one consisting of those who live according to man, the other of those who live according to God. And these we also mystically call the two cities, or the two communities of men, of which the one is **predestined** to reign eternally with God, and the other to suffer eternal punishment with the devil. This, however, is their end, and of it we are to speak afterwards.... Of these two first parents of the human race, then, Cain was the first-born, and he belonged to the city of men; after him was born Abel, who belonged to the city of God. For as in the individual the truth of the apostle’s statement is discerned, ‘that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterward that which is spiritual,’¹⁹ whence it comes to pass that each man, being derived from a condemned stock, is first of all born of Adam evil and carnal, **and becomes good and spiritual only afterwards, when he is grafted into Christ by regeneration**: so was it in the human race as a whole. When these two cities began to run their course by a series of deaths and births, the citizen of this world was the first-born, **and after him the stranger in this world, the citizen of the city of God, predestinated by grace, elected by grace, by grace a stranger below, and by grace a citizen above**. By grace—for so far as regards himself he is sprung from the same mass, all of which is condemned in its origin; but God, like a potter (or this comparison is introduced by the apostle judiciously, and not without thought), **of the same lump made one vessel to honour, another to dishonor**.²⁰ But first the vessel to dishonor was made, and after it another to honour. **For in each individual, as I have already said, there is first of all that which is reprobate, that from which we must begin, but in which we need not necessarily remain; afterwards is that which is well-approved, to which we may abide**. Not, indeed, that every wicked man shall be good, **but that no one will be good who was not first of all wicked; but the sooner any one becomes a good man, the more speedily does he receive this title, and abolish the old name in the**

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 25:46.

²⁰ Romans 9:21.

new. Accordingly, it is recorded of Cain that he built a city, but Abel, being a sojourner, built none. For the city of the saints is above, although here below it begets citizens, in whom it sojourns till the time of its reign arrives, when it shall gather together all in the day of the resurrection; and then shall the promised kingdom be given to them, in which they shall reign with their Prince, the King of the ages, time without end.²¹

Augustine of Hippo's thesis on predestination is that all men are born reprobate, "but...we need not necessarily remain" in this state of reprobation.²² There is in Augustine's theology, then, free choice and voluntary will—but not "free will"; that is to say, there is no free human will that is independent of God's omnipotent will, as is espoused by secular humanism. But, according to Augustine, there is, instead, within each human being a voluntariness of will, or what we may call "voluntary will," whereby they "need not necessarily remain" in a state of reprobation.²³ For in Augustinian theology, there is before every human being the choice between Good and Evil, as Moses presented that choice to Church of Israel in the Old Testament.

Augustine of Hippo expressly rejected "irresistible reprobation" and "irresistible election"—double predestination, because God did not "compel any one to sin."²⁴ Mankind's power of sin stems from his free choice, which is neither beyond God's foreknowledge and can do nothing to thwart God's sovereign will—as many Calvinists incorrectly assume. In *The City of God*, Augustine of Hippo writes:

The sins of men and angels do nothing to impede the 'great works of the Lord which accomplish His will.' For He who by His providence and omnipotence distributes to every one his own portion, is able to make good use not only of the good, but also of the wicked. And thus making a good use of the wicked angel, who, in punishment of his first wicked volition, was doomed to an obduracy that prevents him now from willing any good, why should not God have permitted of his first wicked volition, was doomed to an obduracy that prevents him now from willing any good, **why should not God have permitted him to tempt the first man, who had been**

²¹ *The City of God* (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), pp. 478-479.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 154-155.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 476.

created upright, that is to say, with a good will? For he had been so constituted, that if he looked to God for help, man's goodness should defeat the angel's wickedness; **but if by proud self-pleasing he abandoned God,** his Creator and Sustainer, he should be conquered. **If his will remained upright, through leaning on God's help, he should be rewarded; if it became wicked, by forsaking God, he should be punished.** But even this **trusting in God's help could not itself be accomplished without God's help,** although man had it in **his own power to relinquish the benefits of divine grace by pleasing himself.** For as it is not in our power to live in the world without sustaining ourselves by food, while it is in our power to refuse this nourishment and cease to live, as those who kill themselves, **so it was not in man's power, even in Paradise, to live as he ought without God's help; but it was in his power to live wickedly,** though thus he should cut short his happiness, and incur very just punishment. Since, then, God was not ignorant that man would fall, why should He not have suffered him to be tempted by an angel who hated and envied him? It was not, indeed, that He was unaware that he should be conquered, but because **He foresaw that the man's seed, aided by divine grace, this same devil himself should be conquered,** to the greater glory of the saints. All was brought about in such a manner, that neither did any future even escape God's knowledge, **nor did His foreknowledge compel any one to sin,** and so as to demonstrate in the experience of the intelligent creation, human and angelic, how great a difference there is between the private presumption of the creature and the Creator's protection. For who will dare to believe or say that it was not in God's power to prevent both angels and men from sinning? **But God preferred to leave this in their power,** and thus to show both what evil could be wrought by their pride, and what good by His grace.²⁵

And men are punished by God for their sins often visibly, always secretly, either in this life or after death, although no man acts rightly save by divine aid; and no man or devil acts unrighteously save by the permission of the divine and most just judgment.²⁶

Thus, Reformed Methodism thus embraces this Augustinian view of divine "omniscience," divine "omnipotence," divine "election," divine "grace," and

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 476- 477.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 711

“predestination.” Augustine says that God has not compelled “any one to sin.”²⁷ Hence, the Calvinists have misjudged God’s omnipotence and foreknowledge: God need not “control” man’s choice—for mankind actually has “no free will” but only a “free choice” between good and evil; and mankind’s free choice of evil (i.e., sin) leads only to one inevitable result: death (e.g., suicide) and everlasting punishment. This Reformed-Methodist theological doctrine is not Pelagianism, Arminianism, semi-Augustinianism, or secular “free will.” Like Martin Luther’s *On Bondage of the Will*, the human will is in bondage to sinful living and can do no other; but, with God’s help and grace, that same human will may choose to live righteously.

The Reformed Methodist Theologian must therefore implore modern-day Calvinists to carefully re-consider John Calvin’s Augustinian theology within the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, in light of the actual words and teachings of Jesus Christ (i.e., the Lord’s Prayer and the Parables); in light of Article 17 of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England; and in light of Augustine of Hippo’s actual writings in *On Grace and Free Will*, *Confessions* and *The City of God*, in order to show that “double-predestination” is not an orthodox Christian doctrine. The two great and universal commandments—the duty to love God and to love our fellow humankind—hang all of the law and the prophets, upon which Jesus of Nazareth expounded upon in his several parables (e.g., “Parable of the Good Samaritan” (Luke 10: 25-37) and “Parable of the Unmerciful Servant” (Matt. 18: 23-35).

THE END

²⁷ Ibid., p. 476.