

Evangelical Forum Newsletter



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Your God is too Small: Why Theology Matters

My local church unanimously chose to leave the old-line Baptist state convention in Virginia (the BGAV or Baptist General Association of Virginia), so I do not follow the news of that body very closely any longer. Recently, however, a pastor friend whose church is still in the BGAV made a point of showing me this article that appeared in the Fall 2007 issue of *Virginia Missions* (Vol. 10, Issue 1), promoting the BGAV's state mission offering (Alma Hunt Offering). The author is John V. Upton, a former Southern Baptist missionary, local church pastor, and now the Executive Director of the Virginia Baptist Mission Board. I will reproduce the article in its entirety, so that there can be no question of pulling quotes or illustrations out of context. As you read the article, consider the doctrine of God in Upton's theology:

LIVE IT!...TOGETHER

I'd like to tell you a story. It was written by a rabbi named Marc Gellman, from his book of children's stories called *Does God Have a Big Toe?*

Before there was anything there was God, a few angels, and a huge glob of rocks and water with no place to go. The angels asked God, "Why don't you clean up this mess?"

So God arranged the rocks into planets and stars and just plain rocks. And God arranged the water into oceans and clouds and just plain water. And the angels said, "Well, God, it's neater now, but is it finished?" And God said, "Nope!"

So God filled the world with growing things and creeping things and things only God knows what they are, and when the angels saw it they said, "Is the world finished now?" And God said, "Nope!"

God made a man and woman from some of the water and dust and said to them, "I'm tired now. Please finish up the world for me... it's almost done." But the man and the woman said, "We can't finish the world. You have the plans and we are too little."

"You are big enough," said God. "But I'll give you this. If you keep trying to finish the world, I will be your partner."

They said, "What's a partner?" And God said, "A partner is someone you work with on a big thing that neither of you can do alone. If you have a partner it means you can never give up, because your partner is depending on you. On the days you think I am not doing enough and on the days I think you're not doing enough, even on those days we are still partners and we must not stop trying to finish the world. That's the deal!" And they agreed.

Then the angels asked God, "Is the world finished yet?" And God said, "I don't know. Go ask my partners."

Biblical faith in a thousand ways keeps making this incredible claim: we were made for nothing less than creative partnership with God Almighty and with one another. Even when we blew our part of the partnership, twisted ourselves in the process, broke rank, and fled the partnership, God Almighty came looking for us, laid down into our death

for us, and broke back through into life—not just to forgive us our sins, but to reclaim us as partners.

To say the least, it's an honor. That God should choose us as working partners is the highest honor we may know. It's alright that we can't always see the way we are to go clearly. It's alright that there's pain on the way, confusion, and frustration. It's even alright that not everybody goes. Take courage from good sisters and brothers going with us. And by faith, together, let's move. It's our turn now. It's our turn to press forward on the great course set for all the people of God. Let's just be sure to "Live it... Together!"

Having read the article, let us consider exactly what Upton is saying about God. Upton offers with uncritical approval a parable about creation by Rabbi Marc Gellman. Gellman's "god," however, seems to have little in common with the Jehovah of the Old Testament prophets in the Hebrew Bible. In fact, those with theological acumen recognize that Gellman's (and thereby Upton's) god is, in fact, the weak deity of process theology. He is the same god promoted in Rabbi Kushner's *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. He is good and all that, but he just isn't very powerful. In fact, he needs human beings to help him finish what he starts. He gets tired (an affront to the Biblical doctrine of divine aseity). He is not omnipotent (note that he does not have the strength to complete creation—hardly the Biblical Sustainer). He is not omniscient (when asked if the creation is complete, he replies, "I don't know.").

The sad thing is that in Upton's effort to build up men as God's partners (equals), he does not seem to realize that he has placed the God of the Bible on a theological elevator to the bottom floor.

The God of the Bible does not exactly treat Job as a "partner" in creation when he speaks to him out of the whirlwind in Job 38:

- 2 Who *is* this who darkens counsel By words without knowledge?
 3 Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me.
 4 Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell *Me*, if you have understanding.
 5 Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it?

Nor does Upton's deity sound like the God of Isaiah 40 who needs no counsel from mere men:

- 12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, Measured heaven with a span
 And calculated the dust of the earth in a measure? Weighed the mountains in scales
 And the hills in a balance?
 13 Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, Or *as* His counselor has taught Him?
 14 With whom did He take counsel, and *who* instructed Him, And taught Him in the
 path of justice? Who taught Him knowledge, And showed Him the way of understanding?

To this God the nations are "as a drop in a bucket" and like "dust on the scales" (Isa 40:15). He sits above the circle of the earth and its inhabitants are "like grasshoppers" to him (v. 22). He

asks, “To whom then will you liken Me, or to whom shall I be equal?” (v. 25). The Incarnation is a scandal because this great and sovereign God enters into human flesh in Christ. If the god of process theology becomes a man, we are more likely to shrug and say, “So what? He was more like a man to begin with!”

Upton seems not to perceive the irony of his references to this god as “God Almighty” in the last few paragraphs. Maybe even he was growing a bit uncomfortable with the implications of what the parable is really saying. Gellman’s god is not the God of the Bible.

There are many things that disturb me about the BGAV: its egalitarian views on women in ministry, its “social gospel” missions philosophy, its unwillingness clearly to denounce homosexual conduct, etc. This article, however, made clear the source of doctrinal drift in the BGAV (and in similar mainline Protestant churches and denominations). These churches, their pastors, and denominational leaders have departed from theology proper, that is a Biblical understanding of God. Their god is too small. Get the foundation wrong, and the whole building is dangerously out of line. ♦

JTR

2008 Evangelical Forum Report

The 2008 meeting of the Evangelical Forum was held on September 26-27 (Friday-Saturday) at Jefferson Park Baptist Church in Charlottesville. The meeting topic was “Of God and of the Holy Trinity” and our speakers were Dr. Joseph Pipa, Jr. of Greenville Presbyterian Seminary and Dr. Bruce Ware of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Audio files of the plenary messages can be found at jpbpc.org/ef.html.

Looking ahead to 2009!

Mark you calendar! The 2009 Evangelical Forum will be held September 25-26 (Friday-Saturday), 2009 at Jefferson Park Baptist Church in Charlottesville. We will continue the process we began several years ago of going systematically through the articles of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689). Next year’s topic will be “Of God’s Decrees.”

We are pleased to announce that we will have two excellent speakers for the 2009 Conference. First, **Conrad Mbewe, Pastor of Kabwata Baptist Church in Lusaka, Zambia** will be our guest. Pastor Mbewe has been called the “Spurgeon of Africa.” Second, **Dr. Derek Thomas, Professor of Practical and Systematic Theology at the Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi** will also be with us. Dr. Thomas is respected theologian, churchman, and conference speaker.

The tentative individual message topics:

Pastor Mbewe: “The Sovereignty of God and the Love of God”
“Does Calvinism Kill Evangelism?”

Dr. Thomas: “Is God the Author of Evil?”
“Double Predestination: Biblical or Heretical?”

We hope many will make plans now to attend the 2009 Conference. Please help us spread the word to interested Pastors and laymen.

The Doctrines of Grace: Unconditional Election

By Jeffrey T. Riddle

Note: This is the third of a six part series on the Doctrines of Grace.

As we begin this third article in this series on the doctrines of grace, it might be helpful to review the definition of “the doctrines of grace.” These doctrines are a theological system that makes sense of the Biblical evidence in affirming the sovereignty of God in salvation. These doctrines are often referred to by the acronym TULIP:

- T-Total Depravity (sovereign grace needed)
- U-Unconditional Election (sovereign grace conceived)
- L-Limited Atonement (sovereign grace merited)
- I-Irresistible Grace (sovereign grace applied)
- P-Perseverance of the Saints (sovereign grace preserved)

Previously we examined man’s condition in sin (total depravity). The article on “Free Will” in the Second London Baptist Confession of 1689 well states the sum of that doctrine: “Man, by his fall into the state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able by his own strength to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.” The only way the sin barrier is overcome is by God’s gracious plan of salvation. This brings the discussion, quite naturally, to the issue of God’s election of those who would be saved.

I. What is the doctrine of election?

In contemporary English the word “election” usually refers to a political process. Voters “choose” or “elect” a leader. The Biblical word election also means “choosing,” but it refers to God’s choosing of those who would be saved. The Biblical word for “to choose” is *eklegomai*.

To understand the doctrine of election one must first understand how it rests on the foundation of the Scriptural affirmation of the sovereignty of God. In his exposition of the Second London Baptist Confession (1689), Samuel Waldron offers numerous scriptural proofs for the fact that (1) nothing can frustrate God’s will; and (2) God is sovereign over everything that happens: ¹

(1). Nothing can frustrate God’s will:

- Proverbs 19:21 There are many plans in a man's heart, Nevertheless the LORD's counsel—that will stand.
- Isaiah 14:24-27 (here is reference to the Lord’s plans to defeat Assyria). Cf:

Isaiah 14:24 The LORD of hosts has sworn, saying, “Surely, as I have thought, so it shall come to pass, And as I have purposed, so it shall stand”

¹ Samuel Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Confession* (Evangelical Press, 1989, 2005): pp. 63-64.

27 For the LORD of hosts has purposed, And who will annul *it*? His hand *is* stretched out, And who will turn it back?

- Isaiah 46:9 Remember the former things of old, For I *am* God, and *there is* no other; I *am* God, and *there is* none like Me, 10 Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times *things* that are not *yet* done, Saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,’ 11 Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed I have spoken *it*; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed *it*; I will also do it.
- Psalm 115:3 Our God is in heaven; he does whatever he pleases.
- Psalm 135:6 Whatever the LORD pleases He does, In heaven and in earth, In the seas and in all the deep places.

(2). God is sovereign over everything that happens:

This includes:

- Good and evil events (Isa 45:7; Amos 3:6; Job 1:21; Jer 15:2);
- Sinful acts (Gen 50:20; 2 Sam 16:10-11; 24:1; 1 Chron 21:1; Job 1:11-12, 21; Luke 22:22; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28);
- Free acts of men (Prov 16:1, 9; 21:1; Rom 8:28, 35-39).
- “Chance” occurrences (1 Kgs 22:28-34; Job 5:6; 36:32; Prov 16:33; Jonah 1:7).
- Details of our lives (Job 14:5; Ps. 139:16; Matt 10:29-30; James 4:15).
- Affairs of nations (2 Kgs 5:1; Ps 75:1-7; Prov 21:31; Dan 2:21).
- Final destruction of the wicked (1 Sam 2:25; Prov 16:4; Rom 9:17; 1 Peter 2:8; Jude 1:4).

Next, one must understand that Scripture affirms God’s sovereign election or choosing of those who will be saved. The precedent for this is set in God’s election of Israel in the Old Testament:

Deuteronomy 7:7 The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; 8 but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

God’s election of Israel in the Old Testament is parallel with the way in which Jesus spoke of his election of his disciples in the Gospels:

Matthew 11:27 All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and *the one* to whom the Son wills to reveal *Him*.

John 15:16 You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

The apostles and New Testament authors likewise affirm the doctrine of sovereign election (emphasis added):

Acts 13:48 Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. **And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.**

2 Timothy 1:8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, **9 who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began,** 10 but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, *who* has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, 11 to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.

2 Thessalonians 2:13 But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, **because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth,** 14 to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 1:1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, **2 elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father,** in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.

In addition to the passages cited above, one must carefully examine two key Biblical texts. The first is Ephesians 1:3-12:

3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, **4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,** **5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,** **6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.** **7** In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace **8** which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, **9** having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, **10** that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather to-

gether in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. 11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, 12 that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

The second is Romans 9:9-24:

Romans 9:9 For this *is* the word of promise: “At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son.” 10 And not only *this*, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, *even* by our father Isaac 11 **(for *the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls*),** 12 it was said to her, “The older shall serve the younger.” 13 As it is written, “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.” 14 What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! 15 **For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.”** 16 **So then *it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.*** 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.” 18 **Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.** 19 You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?” 20 But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed *it*, “Why have you made me like this?” 21 Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? 22 *What* if God, wanting to show *His* wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, 24 *even* us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

Notice that the focus in these passages is on the fact that God’s choosing is not “conditioned” on any expected actions or responses of those who are saved, but it is an “unconditional” act of God’s sovereign choice alone.

We hear parents speak about “unconditional love.” They say they love their children “unconditionally.” This means the children do not have to do or say anything in order to be loved. In a similar way, this doctrine says that God’s love for those who are saved is unconditional. He does not save individuals on the condition of their faith, although belief in Christ is always a human response to his saving action once a person has been born again.

II. Objections to and queries concerning this doctrine:

Having offered some Biblical definition to the doctrine of unconditional election, our focus turns to challenges and questions that might be raised concerning this doctrine. Here are nine such questions:

1. Does election in the Bible refer to God's election of individuals to salvation or to something else?

This question usually takes one of three forms. First, some might ask, "Could passages that speak of God's choosing refer to the election of nations or groups and not to individuals?"

Response: Scripture clearly assumes God's sovereignty not merely over corporate bodies but also over individuals (see Prov 16:9; Psalm 139:16; Matt 10:30). Paul says in Ephesians 1:4 "he chose us." He is writing to a specific group (the saints at Ephesus in 1:1), not a generic or hypothetical audience. We should also not forget that groups and nations consist of individuals. It seems odd that some evangelicals who stress the importance of personal evangelism or "soul-winning" will make appeal to this argument, avoiding the most natural interpretation of the texts cited above.

Second, some might ask, "Could these passages refer to God's election (choosing) of Christ?"

Response: Although it is clear that Christ, as the second person of the Godhead, is appointed to the work of incarnation and redemption according to the covenant of redemption, the language of election is applied repeatedly and specifically in Scripture to the people who are to be redeemed.

Third, some might ask, "Could these passages refer to God's election of believers to sanctification and not to salvation?" In this regard, particular appeal is often made to Romans 8:29, which speaks of believers being "predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son."

Response: It is agreed that full sanctification (glorification) is the final stage of salvation. All those who are saved eventually achieve a state of final sanctification commencing either at their deaths or at the Lord's coming and finding consummation at the final resurrection. In places like Romans 8:29-30, Paul is addressing the entire process of salvation. The process of sanctification, however, does not proceed until one is saved. So, the issue of election to sanctification for the believer cannot be used to sidestep the necessary beginning point in the entire process of salvation, which is election.

2. Does election mean that God's choice of those who will be saved is merely random?

Some critics have falsely described the doctrines of grace as a version of the children's game "Duck, Duck, Goose!," with the God of Calvinism making it "Duck, Duck, Damned!" Scripture affirms, however, that God's choices are never arbitrary. God's election is according to his own mysterious purposes and counsels. Indeed, these are often hidden from us, but all tend toward the end of God's own ultimate glory. As the Lord spoke through the prophet Isaiah: "'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways,' says the LORD. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, And my thoughts than your thoughts'" (Isa 55:8-9). The pagan king Nebuchadnezzar, after being humbled by God, likewise affirmed, "All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to him, 'What have you done?'" (Daniel 4:35).

3. Could it be that God simply foreknows those who will freely choose Christ and then elects them?

First, note that Romans 9:11 specifies that the election of Jacob and Esau was not according to their future actions.

Romans 8:29 (“For whom he foreknew, he also predestined...”) is often cited by those who suggest this explanation of election. In response, the point needs to be made that “foreknowledge” does not merely refer to awareness of future factual events but to relationships. The Bible often speaks of a man “knowing” a woman (e.g. Gen 4:1: “Now Adam knew Eve his wife...”). This does not mean that he possesses factual information about her actions, but that he has an intimate relationship with her. It is this understanding of “knowledge” that should guide the interpretation of Romans 8:29.

Finally, the “foreknowledge explanation” really does not solve the problem of divine responsibility. If God foreknows that some will believe in Christ while others will reject Christ, why does he not alter circumstances so that those who reject him will instead respond in faith to Christ? The responsibility for salvation remains firmly with God alone.

4. What about those who are not saved?

There are at least two views on this question:

The first position is to argue that God actively elects persons both to salvation and damnation (cf. John 12:37-40; Romans 9:22-23; 2 Tim 2:20; 1 Peter 2:7-8; Jude 1:4). God elects (chooses) both the saved and the reprobate. This is called double predestination.

The second position is to argue that God is active in electing the saved but passive in allowing the wicked to persist in their sinfulness (see Rom 1:24; Eph 4:17-19). Those who reject Christ are not actively damned by God, but they are passed over and left in their self-chosen sin. This view is generally reflected in the major Reformation-era confessions.

The Second London Baptist Confession (1689) states that some are predestined to eternal life to the praise of his glorious grace while others are “left to act in their sin to their just condemnation to the praise of his glorious justice.” It was C. S. Lewis who said that in the end all men will either say to God, “Thy will be done,” or God will say to them, “Thy will be done.”

It is also certain that God is glorified in both the damned and the saved. Those who are unsaved are the fit objects of God’s wrath and glorify God’s justice for eternity. The saved, however, glorify both the justice of God, as their sins have been laid upon Christ, and his gracious mercy in saving them through no merit of their own.

5. Is this doctrine unfair?

Those who raise this question usually do so on the basis of two false assumptions. On one hand, they assume that there are people who want to be saved who are not saved, simply because God

did not choose them. This view does not take seriously the damage that sin has done to the spiritual life of mankind. No sinner wants to be saved unless God first changes his heart. Paul notes that apart from God's grace "there is none who seeks after God" (Romans 3:11).

On the other hand, some suggest that the doctrine of election means there are people who do not want to be saved, who are saved. Again, such a hypothetical person does not exist. No one is pulled kicking and screaming into the kingdom. Once a sinner experiences the new birth, he gladly trusts and follows after Christ.

The apostle Paul anticipated the charge of unfairness in Romans 9:14: "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!" Paul reminds his readers that God is sovereign, having mercy and compassion on whomever he will (see Rom 9:15). Likewise in Romans 9:19, Paul anticipates the objections of some: "You will say to me then, 'Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?'" Paul then silences the critics with these words: "But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to Him who formed it, 'Why have you made me like this?'" (v. 20).

The problem with the fairness argument is that it places a human view of justice above the revelation of God's sovereignty. Scripture affirms the Godhood of God. Whatever God chooses to do is by definition the very standard of everything that is good, right, just, and true. Once more look at the words of Nebuchadnezzar: "No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, 'What have you done?'" (Dan 4:35).

6. What about human responsibility?

The doctrine of election is not inconsistent with human responsibility. The Second London Baptist Confession notes that God decrees "whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby God is neither the author of sin nor hath fellowship with any therein; nor is violence offered to the will of the creature...."

Those who are not saved are completely responsible for their own end. The wicked pay the due penalty for their sin. No one in hell will protest that God has treated him unfairly. The sinner is responsible for his own sin and his own rejection of Christ.

On the other hand, those whom God chooses to save have their sinful will renewed. Those who are saved must repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Without repentance and faith they will not be saved. They respond in faith to Christ knowing that God alone deserves all praise for their salvation.

7. Couldn't God intentionally limit his will and then choose men for salvation conditioned on their free will choice of him?

First, this is essentially a philosophical argument rather than a Biblical argument. Where in Scripture do we read of God's self-limitation with regard to salvation? Where in the Bible do we find the framework for this theory?

Second, this view again errs in its overly optimistic view of man's free will. It assumes that sinful, unregenerate man is seeking to know, trust, and worship the God of the Bible. Scripture notes that no man, in his current sinful condition, will freely choose to bend the knee before the God of the Bible and his Christ. As a proverb in 1 Samuel 24:13 puts it, "wickedness proceeds from the wicked."

8. Does this doctrine create pride and elitism in those who believe they are among the elect?

This is certainly possible. Pride is a perennial and fundamental sin in all men. The doctrine of election properly understood, however, does little to promote pride in those who embrace it. The believer who affirms this doctrine understands that he was not saved because of any merit in himself, but purely through the grace of God. He was not more intelligent, more spiritual, or more upright than other men. He was simply the object of Christ's affection through no merit of his own. A right understanding of this doctrine deposes pride and develops humility in the Christian's heart.

9. Will this doctrine dull our zeal for evangelism?

Scripture teaches that God not only ordains the recipients of salvation in election, but he also ordains the means for their salvation. In Romans 10:14-15 Paul gave this charge to preach the gospel:

14 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?

15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? *As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!"*

The apostle then adds: "So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom 10:17). All those who are chosen for salvation must have the gospel preached to them, so that they might hear and believe in Christ. The orchestration and coordination of this is in God's hands. We do not know who will respond to the gospel. We do not choose who will be saved. We discover those whom God has chosen as we watch the elect respond in faith to gospel preaching.

In the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20), Christ ordered his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the triune God, and teaching them to obey all of the Lord's commandments. The doctrine of election, far from quenching zeal for evangelism, gives us great confidence and boldness that we will be successful in this task. If we preach Christ, God will draw all kinds of men to himself (see John 12:32). The greatest cross-cultural missionaries in the evangelical world have been those who held to these doctrines, starting with William Carey, the father of the modern missions movement.

III. Conclusion and Caution:

The doctrine of election is the Biblical teaching that God himself chooses those who will be saved. We see this doctrine throughout Scripture. It is plainly referred to in places like Paul's letter to the Ephesians when he spoke of the believers being blessed with every blessing in Christ "just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will" (Eph 1:4-5). This doctrine gives us boldness and confidence in sharing the good news of Christ, knowing there are many set apart by God Himself for salvation.

This doctrine is also to be held with care and caution, knowing that we, as human beings, are not privy to all the mysteries bound up in the counsels of God. The last paragraph in the Second London Baptist Confession's statement on God's decrees offers a caution all should heed:

The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men attending the will of God revealed in his Word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election; so shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God, and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the gospel.

Calvin himself warned against excessive "human curiosity" with regard to predestination (election). He noted that "If allowed [such curiosity] will leave no secret to God which it will not search out and unravel." So, Calvin urged believers to avoid "wanton curiosity." On the other hand, however, he noted that some "all but require that every mention of predestination be buried; indeed, they teach to avoid any question of it, as he would a reef." Calvin concludes, "Let us, I say, permit the Christian man to open his mind and ears to every utterance of God directed to him, provided it be with such restraint that when the Lord closes his holy lips, he shall also at once close the way to inquiry."² ♦

² As quoted in Edwin H. Palmer, *The Five Points of Calvinism*, pp. 118-19.

Joel Beeke, *Striving Against Satan: Knowing the Enemy—His Weakness, His Strategy, His Defeat* (Bryntirion Press, no date given): 126 pp.

Joel Beeke is a prolific Pastor, Scholar, Publisher, and Puritanophile. This short work (adapted from a series of addresses Beeke gave at the Metropolitan Tabernacle School of Theology in London in July 2004) is a practical effort to address the reality of Satan and spiritual warfare from a balanced, Biblical perspective. On one hand, Beeke desires to avoid the extremes of the charismatic movement and the sensationalism of attention to demonic warfare. On the other hand, he wants to avoid the errors of liberals who deny the existence of Satan and his hosts. For Beeke, “Today is an opportune time for word-centred evangelicals to promote a biblically balanced view of Satan and demons that avoids both denial and obsession” (p. 31).

The book has four parts. In Part One (Knowing the Enemy), Beeke presents an overview of the Biblical and historical teaching on Satan. He acknowledges that every believer is engaged in spiritual warfare. Beeke denies the teaching of some charismatics that a believer can be demon-possessed (p. 23) and rebukes the error of “unhealthy interest in devils” that mitigates personal responsibility (p. 31). Nevertheless, he affirms that “When God becomes real to a believer, Satan also becomes real” (p. 34).

In Part Two (Knowing Satan’s Weaknesses), Beeke draws on Ralph Erskine’s strategies for fighting Satan, including strategic retreat (“running for shelter to Christ”), an unyielding defense, and an attacking offense. He traces the weapons of defense and offense in an exposition of the whole armor of God in Ephesians 6.

In Part Three (Knowing His Strategies), the author “brings together the cream of what six Puritan authors [Thomas Brooks, Richard Gilpin, William Spurstowe, John Downname, William Gurnall, and Thomas Goodwin] taught about Satan’s devices and their remedies” in particular works on this topic (p. 65). This section is filled with practical counsel. For example, in discussing Satan’s strategy of enticing to sin by the device of offering the bait of pleasure to hide the hook of sin, Beeke expands on five remedies: (1) Remember the consequences of yielding to temptation; (2) Don’t toe-dangle (i.e., stay away from situations where temptation occurs); (3) Stay actively involved in growth and ministry; (4) Share sustained temptations with a close, confidential, Christian friend; (5) Remember that you cannot remain neutral to any temptation (pp. 73-74).

In Part Four (Knowing Satan’s Defeat), a concluding challenge is offered for believers to engage in spiritual victory in the three spheres of our personal lives, churches, and nation. Beeke calls for the cultivation of personal holiness among believers. This does not mean withdrawal from the world, like monks or the Amish, but fighting in the world. Nor does it mean “sanctifying everything in the world for Christ” since “sinful activities can never be sanctified” (p. 93). In the church we need reformation and revival. Reformation without revival “will remain cold and formal, and can even be destructive” (p. 108). On the other hand, revival without reformation “promotes heat without light, zeal without soundness” (p. 110). In the nation Christians are to pursue prayer and evangelism. “One-on-one evangelism, not national politics, can save our backslidden countries” (p. 118).

Beeke's book offers a balanced treatment of an often-neglected subject among conservative Bible-believing Christians. It is filled with much practical advice and counsel to spur one toward battling Satan, mortifying sin, and growing in holiness. This book would be an ideal short study for a Bible study or discipleship group. One other benefit: Beeke has liberally sprinkled the text with many powerful and helpful quotations from Reformation and Puritan heroes that are worthy of collecting, considering, and utilizing in ministry. ♦

Jeffrey T. Riddle, Pastor, Jefferson Park Baptist Church, Charlottesville, Virginia.

Book Review

Lifeway Christian Resources, *Baptist Hymnal* [2008], Nashville, Tenn.: Lifeway, 2008: 896 pp.

If you grew up in Southern Baptist circles you know that the denomination's publishing arm (now called Lifeway Christian Resources) puts out a new hymnal every 15-20 years. Many tried and true Southern Baptists can recall the number of "Amazing Grace" whether in the "56" the "75" or the "91."¹ With over forty-five thousand churches affiliated with the SBC, this new hymnal is sure to be used and have long lasting influence in the worship and theology of many congregations. Beyond SBC circles (and perhaps also in SBC churches that wish to avoid the name "Baptist"), Lifeway is also marketing a generic version of the hymnal titled simply *Worship Hymnal*. This hymnal, therefore, will have an influence in larger Baptist and evangelical circles.

This essay will offer a review of the new hymnal. I do not write as a church musician but as a Pastor and Theologian. My review, therefore, will not examine the musical qualities of the new hymnal (which I leave to those more capable of evaluating such things) but its doctrinal content.

In the Introduction, the editors note that the new hymnal contains "hymns and worship songs that the church is singing." The sense here is that the selections reflect the musical practice in most churches, rather than imposing what *ought* to be sung. The compilation was guided by queries made of "worship leaders, pastors, praise teams, and choir members from churches of all sizes and approaches to worship." They add, "Generally, hymns and worship songs had to have some history of ongoing acceptance to be included." A Theology Committee reviewed each work for "scriptural integrity." The 2008 hymnal is also the first one to enter the digital age. With support from lifewaymusic.com, those who use the hymnal may download songs and printed music "including its entire ancillary audio, print, and informational elements."

The new hymnal consists of 674 individual "hymns and worship songs." The 1991 has 666. The Table of Contents divides the hymns into nine categories:

1. God the Father (1-126);
2. Jesus the Son (127-326);
3. The Holy Spirit (327-335);
4. The Trinity (336-337)

¹ It is No. 188 in the 1956 *Baptist Hymnal*, No. 165 in the 1975 *Baptist Hymnal*; No. 330 in the 1991 *Baptist Hymnal* and now No. 104 in the 2008 *Baptist Hymnal*. Some might even recall that it was No. 161 in the 1940 *Broadman Hymnal*.

5. The Word of God (338-345);
6. The Church (346-410);
7. We Respond to God's Love (411-634);
8. Special Categories (635-665);
9. Service Music (666-674).

Various Scripture readings and suggestions for thematic and musically compatible medleys are included throughout the hymnal. In addition, thirty "Connective Worship Scripture Readings" are included at the back (pp. 851-862). Three Bible translations are used in the Scripture readings: Lifeway's *Holman Christian Standard Bible*, the *King James Version*, and the *New International Version*. One noteworthy addition to the "special categories" music is the inclusion for the first time of No. 647 "O Canada!" along with No. 644 "The Star Spangled Banner."

What hymns and worship songs are included in the hymnal? We might note from the outset that the 2008 hymnal retains many of the best loved classic Christian hymns of the past (like No. 1 "Praise to the Lord the Almighty"; No. 13 "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee," and No. 181 "Joy to the World!"). Many of these, according to the editors, have been "resurrected" with 56 given "reharmonized last stanzas and choruses." One improvement is the inclusion of both the ELLA-COMBE and FOREST GREEN tunes for "I Sing the Mighty Power of God" (Nos. 48, 49; in contrast to the 1991 which has only the FOREST GREEN tune). There are three settings of the text of Isaac Watts' "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" (No. 234 to the classic HAMBURG tune, No. 235 to the Appalachian folk melody O WALY WALY, and No. 239, the contemporary hymn "The Wonderful Cross"). The new hymnal also retains many of the old gospel favorites (e.g., No. 386 "Brethren, We Have Met to Worship" and No. 420 "Come, Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy").

What will strike the reader of this hymnal is not its inclusion of traditional hymns, however, but the presence of a large number of contemporary hymns and choruses. The 2008 *Baptist Hymnal* is the first such volume to reflect widely the tremendous influence of contemporary praise and worship music in Baptist and evangelical church life. Here are a few examples of new selections:

- No. 5 "How Great is Our God" by Chris Tomlin;
- No. 26 "Blessed Be Your Name" by Matt and Beth Redman;
- No. 30 "Come, Now Is the Time to Worship" by Brian Doerksen;
- No. 50 "Indescribable" by Laura Story and Jesse Reeves;
- No. 66 "Open the Eyes of My Heart" by Paul Baloche;
- No. 77 "Better is One Day" by Matt Redman;
- No. 116 "I Could Sing of Your Love Forever" by Martin Smith;
- No. 127 "The Heart of Worship" by Matt Redman;
- No. 130 "Here I Am to Worship" by Tim Hughes;
- No. 133 "Shout to the Lord" by Darlene Zschech;
- No. 143 "You are My All In All" by Dennis L. Jernigan;
- No. 289 "Days of Elijah" by Robin Mark;
- No. 350 "Shout to the North" by Martin Smith;
- No. 481 "Breathe" by Marie Barnett;
- No. 487 "Knowing You (All I Once Held Dear)" by Graham Kendrick;
- No. 525 "Lord, Reign in Me" by Brenton Brown;
- No. 529 "Change My Heart, O God" by Eddie Esinoza.

The new hymnal also has a significant scattering of Southern gospel songs. The 1991 hymnal, for example, had five songs from Bill or Gloria Gaither, while the new hymnal has twelve Gaither songs (new selections include No. 145 “Let’s Just Praise the Lord,” No. 246 “I Believe in a Hill Called Mount Calvary,” and No. 628 “He Touched Me”). Further examples of this trend include the new selections of gospel songs like No. 93 “His Eye Is on the Sparrow” and No. 601 “I’ll Fly Away.”

In addition to these popular chorus-type and gospel songs, the new hymnal also includes several of the most recent contemporary hymns from the likes of Keith Getty and Stuart Townend. Here are a few:

- No. 101 “How Deep the Father’s Love” by Stuart Townsend;
- No. 404 “The Communion Hymn” by Keith Getty, Krysten Getty, and Stuart Townend;
- No. 432 “Speak O Lord” by Keith Getty and Stuart Townend;
- No. 506 “In Christ Alone (My Hope is Found)” by Keith Getty and Stuart Townend.

Getty (b. 1974) was a teenager when the 1991 hymnal was produced! One might well conclude that the 2008 hymnal reflects the triumph of “blended” worship among Southern Baptists and in wider evangelicalism.

The inclusion of so many new worship songs necessarily means the exclusion of some classic hymns. The new hymnal retains, for example, only one work by Horatius Bonar (No. 593 “I Lay My Sins on Jesus”). Gone are three others that appeared in the 1991 hymnal: “No, Not Despairingly,” “Not What My Hands Have Done,” and “I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say.” Sadly, Josiah Conder’s “My Lord, I Did Not Choose You” has been omitted, as has Isaac Watts’ “I’ll Praise My Maker” and “My Shepherd Shall Supply My Need.” Also gone is the family hymn, “God Give Us Christian Homes.” Another omission from the 1991 is Charles Wesley’s “Lo, He Comes with Clouds Descending.” Opportunity was also lost to include classic hymns that have regularly been omitted from Baptist hymnals like Isaac Watts’ “How Sweet and Awful.”

As is typical of modern Baptist hymnals, there is minimal space given to the inclusion of psalms for singing. The hymnal does, however, include for the first time a version of Psalm 23 from the *Scottish Psalter* (No. 79 “The Lord’s My Shepherd, I’ll Not Want”).

It might well be said that the new hymnal also reflects the conservative resurgence in the SBC. The 1991 hymnal was put together at the close of the 1979-1990 SBC conflict and, to some degree, reflected moderate Baptist influence. In the 2008 hymnal, gone, for example, are some of the hymns from liberal mainline writers (e.g., two from Thomas Troeger that appeared in the 1991 hymnal and one from liberal Quaker David Elton Trueblood) and from some moderate-leaning SBC musicians (e.g., three from Phillip Landgrave that appeared in the 1991 hymnal). The 1991 hymnal featured five hymns by Brian Wren and seven by Frederick Pratt Green, while the 2008 has no Wren hymns and only one from Green. Gone also are hymns that reflect the moderate interpretation of “the priesthood of believer” (e.g., 1991’s “In Christ, Our Liberty” by Lester Bork, with the line, “Tho’creeds and laws imposed by pow’r May mock equality, Our trust in Christ and Christ alone Will keep our spirits free”).

How would we critique the new hymnal? In general we must conclude that the hymnal will contribute to the increasing legitimization of the use of contemporary praise and worship music in SBC churches as a preference over traditional hymns. Although the 2008 hymnal includes some new hymns with theological meat (like those of Getty and Townend), one wonders what the inclusion of so many doctrinally thin choruses will do for the health of SBC and evangelical churches in the long term. One wonders as well how many of these will hold lasting value for the worshipping church. Some of these choices already seem quite dated (for example, No. 63 “Awesome God” by Rich Mullins or “Celebrate Jesus” by Gary Oliver, both written in 1988).

One wonders as well, how many of the kinds of churches who regularly use these kinds of songs typically make use of digital projection rather than hymn books. It seems that the churches with more traditional worship are most likely to use a hymn book in the pew and these would favor hymns over choruses.

With regards to the doctrinal perspectives of the hymn writers, the new hymnal offers a broad range. This includes songs from charismatics like Darlene Zschech (she has three songs that appear for the first time in the Baptist hymnal) and Jack Hayford (No. 297 “Majesty”), Protestant liberals like Harry Emerson Fosdick (No. 115 “God of Grace and God of Glory”), Roman Catholics like Frederick W. Faber (No. 594 “Faith of our Fathers”), and even Unitarians (!) like Edmund Sears (No. 188 “It Came Upon the Midnight Clear”). Although some might tout the diversity of the new hymnal, others might wonder if doctrinal unity and clarity has been sacrificed. What fruit of discernment has the conservative restoration brought to the SBC?

In addition, the new hymnal reflects little overt attention to perhaps the most significant doctrinal shift in contemporary SBC life—the resurgence of Reformed theology. If this hymnal reflects the doctrine of the Southern Baptist Convention, then it reveals a lack of doctrinal definition and a lack of agreement on fundamental issues relating to worship. The question that lingers is whether this kind of diversity is to be celebrated or bemoaned. ♦

Jeffrey T. Riddle, Pastor, Jefferson Park Baptist Church, Charlottesville, Virginia.

Quick Quotes

The Priority of Prayer

Charles Spurgeon: “We must addict ourselves to prayer.”

D. Martin Lloyd-Jones: “Everything we do in the Christian life is easier than prayer.”

Matthew Henry: “A good man is never less alone than when he is alone with God.”

Joel Beeke: “Part of our problem is that we view prayer as an appendix to our work rather than as the first major part of our work. If we are to live godly lives, we must pray. If we would learn the art of sacred wrestling and holy argument with God, we must pray. Prayer is the only way to lay hold of God.”

John Owen: “To preach the Word and not follow it with constant prayer for its success is to disbelieve its use, to neglect its end, and to cast away the seed of the gospel at random.”

Hudson Taylor: “Do not be so busy with the work of Christ that you have no strength left for prayer.”

Paradosis

Paradosis is the Greek word for “tradition.” It is also the title for this recurring section featuring voices from the Baptist past.

This article includes a portion of a message titled “Predestination” (text: Acts 27:22-24, 30-31) preached by Richard Fuller (1804-1876). Fuller was a native of South Carolina who was raised in the Episcopal Church. He entered Harvard in 1820 at age 16 and later pursued a career in law. He was called to preach and became convicted of Baptist principles as a young man. He served for fifteen years as Pastor of Beaufort Baptist Church in Beaufort, South Carolina before serving Seventh Baptist Church in Baltimore and then the Eutaw Place Baptist Church in the same city. Fuller was also a denominational statesman, serving as the third President of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1859 and elected to a second term in 1861.

In the doctrinal sermon excerpted below, Fuller affirms belief both in the Biblical doctrine of predestination and the Biblical doctrine of human responsibility. The sermon has two parts. The first is a doctrinal exposition and the second practical application. The paragraphs below come from the conclusion of the doctrinal exposition. Source: Thomas J. Nettles, Ed. Southern Baptist Sermons on Sovereignty and Responsibility (Harrisonburg, Va.: Gano Books, [1984] 2003): pp. 121-22.

Richard Fuller on “Predestination”

Do you receive the doctrine of predestination? Certainly. To reject it, I would have to stultify my intellect, to discard prophecy, which is based upon this truth, to abjure the unequivocal teachings of the Bible, to believe that God has abandoned the earth to chance and disorder, and to plunge into I know not what absurdities. Well, then you do not receive the doctrine of man's free agency. Indeed I do; for otherwise I must renounce my own distinct consciousness, I must disbelieve the Scriptures, I must make God the author and yet the punisher of sin, I must precipitate myself into I know not what absurdities. I embrace both doctrines. Nay, more; I see clearly that if I reject either of these great truths and cling to the other, it will tow me away into fathomless depths of folly and impiety. But, how do you reconcile these two doctrines? Reconcile! I do not reconcile them at all. I am not required to reconcile them. Who made me a judge and reconciler of God's acts and attributes and clearly revealed testimonies? No, my brethren; let us rather with Job exclaim, “Behold I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer; yea, twice, but I will proceed no farther. Lo, these are parts of thy ways, but how little a portion is heard of him. I know that thou canst do everything therefore have I uttered that I understood not, things too wonderful for me which I knew not. Canst thou by searching find our God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven, what canst thou do? Deeper than hell, what canst thou know?”

For my own part, as I contemplate these two grand doctrines I seem to see two parallel lines stretching away into eternity with thousands of other lines, all of which my vision can pursue but a little way. How they can ever meet, or whether they meet at all, I have no means of deciding. They appear to be ultimate facts, between which we can discover no links, but which are perfectly harmonious in the Divine Mind. We can discern no connection between them; but it is preposterous to affirm that there is collision;--*pre-posterous* in the exact meaning of the word, since a pre-requisite to such an assertion is a knowledge which we cannot possess.

When I affirm two distinct truths, you never refuse to believe each, unless I can show some connection between them. “There is such a country as England.” “The sun is shining brightly.” What would you think of his intellect who should say, Both these propositions are clear, but I will not receive them unless you show me the relation between them. Such a man you would pronounce a lunatic. Very well, now apply this reasoning to the doctrines before us. “God has preordained all things.” “Man is a free responsible agent.” Neither of these propositions can be denied; why do you reject either of them, unless I can show the connection between them? You will reply, Because they contradict each other. Now, this I deny, and this you cannot possibly prove. The whole matter is reduced to this single question: Can God foreordain all things, and yet form an intelligent being who shall be a perfectly free, moral, accountable agent? And it is clearly preposterous for any finite mind to attempt to answer that question; for the decision demands omniscience. God only can solve the problem, and, as we have his solution,—as he declares that he has peopled the earth with beings as free as if there were no decrees—our duty is plain. In this, as in other mysteries of Godliness, our speculations must cease, we must subject our “philosophy and vain deceit” to the decisions of Revelation. Reason must ascertain what God says, and then both faith and reason must acquiesce in humility and reverence. ♦

Mark Your Calendar!

2009 Evangelical Forum
Friday – Saturday
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Jefferson Park Baptist Church
Charlottesville, Virginia

Topic:
Of God’s Decrees

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**Conrad Mbewe, Pastor, Kabwata Baptist Church, Lusaka,
 Zambia**

**Derek Thomas, Professor of Practical and Systematic
 Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson,
 Mississippi**

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