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**EPHESIANS 2: 1 – 10: THE IRREVOCABLE
NATURE OF SALVATION**

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I n t r o d u c t i o n

The doctrine of salvation is one, which has posed a lot of controversies to the Christian church right from its inception and running to the present era. In the early days of the church, as evident in the Acts of the Apostles, the controversies were over the place of the Mosaic Law and the Temple rituals in the salvation of humankind. However, beginning from the patristic era, the most divisive question has been that of predestination and its related doctrines of election, total depravity, the extent of the atonement, the security of the believer, etc. These questions have polarized the evangelical church into what is now referred to as the Reformed (or/and Calvinists) and the Arminians. While many volumes have rolled out of the printing press portending to solve this problem, the debate rages on without any end in sight, at least in the nearest future. Whether consensus will ever be reached on these issues or not is unpredictable.

What this paper is set out to accomplish is to present the Reformed position on an aspect of this complex issue, namely, the perseverance of the saints, otherwise referred to as ‘Eternal security of the Saints’ (herein couched as the irrevocable nature of salvation).

The scope of our investigation is the Epistle to Ephesians chapter 2: 1 – 10. Our approach would be to do an exegesis of this Bible passage as it hinges on this doctrine of eternal security. We shall, however begin with a definition of the concept of salvation, after which we would present the Reformed teaching on eternal security. Our attention would thereafter be turned on our Bible passage, Ephesians 2:1-10 for a critical study. The paper would be concluded by engaging into an interaction with an erstwhile defender of the Reformed doctrine of eternal security, Wayne Grudem. We now turn to a consideration of what salvation is for the Christians.

II. The Concept of Salvation

One of the key words of our topic is salvation. This also is the central tenet of Christianity. In order to flow together in this paper, it would be important to highlight what we hold as salvation, particularly, as taught in the Christian Bible. And since the Bible is made up of the Old and New Testaments, we would do a brief survey of what these two testaments hold about salvation.

Generally speaking, the word ‘salvation’ or ‘*yesa*’ is used in the Old Testament to refer to the mundane idea of ‘bringing into a spacious environment’ or ‘freedom from limitation’¹. As rightly observed by I.H. Marshall,

THE WORD GROUP ASSOCIATED WITH THE VERB ‘SAVE’ HAS AN EXTENSIVE SECULAR USAGE, WHICH IS NOT SHARPLY DIFFERENTIATED FROM ITS THEOLOGICAL USAGE. IT CAN BE USED OF ANY KIND OF SITUATION IN WHICH A PERSON IS DELIVERED FROM SOME DANGER, REAL OR POTENTIAL; AS IN HEALING A PERSON FROM ILLNESS (Mk. 5: 28), FROM ENEMIES (Ps. 44: 7) OR FROM THE POSSIBILITY OF DEATH (Mt. 8: 25)².

Furthermore, the Old Testament conceives God as the author of salvation who saves His people from their enemies (Ezek. 34: 22; Hos. 1: 7 and 13: 1 – 14). The word ‘deliverance’ is of the same essence with ‘salvation’. Thus the deliverance of Israel from Egypt

¹ G. Walters & B.A. Milne, “Salvation” in *New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd Ed. By J.D. Douglas et al. Leicester: IVP, 1982, P. 1057.

² I.H. Marshall, “Salvation” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, Ed by S.B. Ferguson, D.F. Wright & J.I. Packer. Leicester: IVP, 1988, P. 610

(Ex. 12: 40 – 14: 31) is seen as being normative of God’s saving act. It is based on this notion that the people of Israel in their days of depression projected that some time in the future in a Day of Yahweh their Saviour would intervene and deliver them from their enemies and punish those who opposed them (Is. 43: 11 – 21; Deut. 9: 4 – 6; Ezek. 36: 22 – 23; Isa. 24: 19f; 25: 6 – 8; Joel 2: 1; 28 – 32 and Amos 5: 18f; 9: 11f³. This expectation was usually thought of as the new exodus.

A development of the concept of salvation in the Old Testament took place after the deliverance from the Babylonian captivity. Contrary to Israel’s expectations, their deliverance was not total. This led to an apocalyptic forward projection of the hope of total deliverance and exaltation termed as the “transcendental-eschatological” (Isa. 64: 1f. 365: 17f; and 66: 22). In this, history became divided into two stages, the present world (*Olam hazzeh*) and the world to come (*Olam habba*). This, of course, conceives of salvation in concrete terms rather than in spiritual terms. However, while it is true that the Old Testament concept of salvation is more about concrete issues than spiritual, there are glimpses of Yahweh’s moral salvation in the messianic songs such as Isaiah 49: 1 – 8 and Isaiah 52: 13 – 53: 12 where deliverance from sin and its consequences can be seen.

When we pass from the Old to the New Testament, we find a completely different picture. Salvation is understood in a different way. While the sense of deliverance is still uppermost, the reference is to deliverance from sin and from God’s wrath as the ultimate fate awaiting the sinner (Rom. 5: 9 – 10) and not just from mundane elements as in the Old Testament. Thus we find that the synoptic Gospels teach that to be saved is to meet certain spiritual demands such as the possession of a contrite heart, childlike receptive helplessness and the renunciation of everything else for Christ (see Mk. 8: 35; Lk. 7: 50; 8: 12; 13: 24; Mt. 10: 22 and Lk. 18: 26). It means to repent of one’s past life and to adopt a new life style in Christ. This is described as being born again (Jn. 3: 5, 1: 12f.) or taking on a new nature (I Cor. 3: 17), and the way to do this is to repent and believe in Jesus Christ as the Saviour (see Jn. 3: 16; Acts

³ G. Walter and B.A. Milne, NBD, *Op. Cit.*, p. 1057.

3: 38). When these steps are taken, it is believed that salvation has taken place to the one taking the steps.

The New Testament speaks of salvation as being in three stages: First of all, there is the futurist notion exemplified in the following passages – Acts 2: 21; Rom. 13: 11, I Cor. 5: 5; Heb. 28 and I Pet. 1: 15. This is the commonest New Testament notion. The second stage is that of the present notion – “are being saved”, exemplified in Acts 2: 47; I Cor. 18, and 2 Cor. 2: 15) while the third stage is the ‘already’ or ‘past’ notion – ‘have been saved’, exemplified in our study passage, Eph. 2: 5, 8. Thus it can be summed up here that salvation is God’s act of delivering people from their sins and His wrath through Christ’s atoning sacrifice and placing them in a state wherein they may enjoy His blessings and inherit eternal life.

While this sounds very simple, Christian theology has made the details very complex. We shall in the next section present the Reformed concept of the status of those so saved as described above.

III. The Reformed Teaching on Eternal Security or the Perseverance of the Saints

The Reformed doctrine of ‘eternal security’ or ‘the perseverance of the saints’ is part of a complex doctrine of salvation attributed to the erstwhile reformer, Jean Calvin, although Saint Augustine before him had held a similar view of salvation. This doctrine, which is taught in the scriptures, is known as predestination. It embraces such themes as election, efficacious grace, total depravity, perseverance or eternal security and limited atonement. Eternal security is particularly contingent on two of these other themes of predestination, namely, election and efficacious grace.⁴ It would therefore be necessary for the sake of logicality to briefly review these other themes upon which perseverance or eternal security of the saints is based.

Let us take up, first, the doctrine of election. This was a cardinal teaching of Calvin, and it is by every inch scriptural. The Lord Jesus himself had alluded to it in his saying, ‘many are called but few are chosen’ (Matt. 22: 14). After Him, Apostle Paul elucidated this doctrine (see Rom. 8: 29 – 30; 11: 7; Eph. 1: 4 – 6; 2

⁴ D.N. Steele and C.C. Thomas, *The Five Points of Calvinism: defined, defended, documented.*, Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed Pub. Co., 1963, P. 56 – 57.

Thess. 2: 13 and 2 Tim. 2: 10). He talked about God predestining that a special class of people known as the ‘elect’ should conform to His plan of salvation and be saved.

Two pertinent questions to be asked in relation to the above are: (i) what motivated Jean Calvin to lay so much emphasis on this doctrine? (ii) How do the elect come to the saving knowledge of God? To the first question, R.S. Wallace says, it was Calvin’s desire to help the individual to live the Christian life with full assurance that led the former to lay so much emphasis on the doctrine of predestination. According to him, Calvin ‘believed that no Christian could be finally victorious and confident unless he had some sense of his election to salvation.’⁵ An answer to the second question brings us to other doctrine upon which eternal security is based. This has to do with the efficacy of Christ’s death. Over this question, the Reformed position goes somewhat as follows: First of all, salvation in its entirety is the work of God since fallen or condemned humanity is completely unable to change their status or condition. The death of Christ on the cross was to save the elect and not all people. Thus, Christ made effective atonement for the sins of all those elected to salvation. This makes the Holy Spirit to draw them invincibly to Christ by giving them the gift of faith (and indeed the grace to live holy lives).⁶ The foregoing has two implications. First, that the atonement Christ accomplished is limited in its scope, i.e., it is only for the elect unto salvation and not for those ‘elected’ unto reprobation. Secondly, since those elected are drawn to God invincibly, they irresistibly conform to the plan of salvation.

This raises two critical issues: (i) the issue of human responsibility or freewill , and (ii) the justice of God in electing some to salvation and others to damnation and holding the latter responsible for their lack of faith.

Reformed theologians follow St. Augustine when it comes to the issue of human free will and theodicy. Augustine had taught in *De correption et gratia* as follows:

⁵ R.S. Wallace, “Calvin, John” in *New Dictionary of Theology*. Ed. By S.B. Ferguson, D.F. Wright and J.I. Packer. Leicester: IVP, 1988, P. 123.

⁶ R.W.A. Letham, “Reformed Theology” in *New Dictionary of Theology* Op. Cit, p. 570 – 72.

God's will is omnipotent and efficacious. There is no doubt that human wills cannot resist (*in sensu compositio*) the will of God, who hath done whatsoever He willed in heaven and on earth, in that he does what He wills and when He wills. Undoubtedly, He has the power to move the human heart to submit, as it pleases Him, to His omnipotent will.⁷

The implication of the above is that human beings are at the mercy of God, whose will is supreme. This is so because He is a Sovereign Being who cannot be challenged by any mortal or creature just as clay cannot challenge the potter (Rom. 9). And apart from the fact that God's sovereignty gives Him the prerogative to 'elect' people as He wills either unto salvation or condemnation, it is also argued by Reformed theologians that all human beings became sinners by virtue of the Fall of Adam and as such God owes no one any mercy at all. Thus it is out of His sheer goodwill that He has chosen to save those who are being saved. His act of election could be explained in just the same way that a king or ruler grants amnesty to some prisoners and leaves others in incarceration. Those left in prison cannot charge the ruler with injustice, because they are suffering their just penalty. Calvin also in his comment on this issue said that what underlies this choice of the elect is God's 'gratuitous mercy, totally irrespective of human merit', and regarding those devoted to condemnation, he said "the gate of life is closed by a just and irreprehensible, but incomprehensible, judgment"⁸.

The responses above, though ingenious, leave much to be desired of these questions "about human responsibility and God's justice in electing some to be reprobates and yet holding them responsible for their lack of faith. We will return to these questions later. What we have done so far is to survey the doctrine of election and irresistible grace as held by Reformed theology. Thus far, we have seen that to the Reformed theologians, by His eternal decree,

⁷ St. Augustine, 'De Correctione et gratia, Chapt. 14' in Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*. Translated by Dom Bede Rose, (London: B. Herder Book Co., 1950), P. 43.

⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes III, XXI, 7*, 1959.

God has elected some people to life eternal and those thus elected eventually get saved as the Spirit irresistibly draws them to God⁹.

Giving the foregoing position, Reformed theology argues that if God eternally elects anyone to salvation, draws that person by His Spirit to faith unto salvation, that person would also remain saved to the end, because, the Holy Spirit will give to the person prevenient grace to abide till the end. According to Letham “The Spirit not only brings us to Christ but keeps us there. The whole process of sanctification and perseverance requires out strenuous effort in faith, but that effort itself is the Spirit’s gift. Thus, none of the elect can finally fall away from grace so as to be lost”¹⁰.

Reformed theologians to support their position on the irrevocability of salvation generally use the following arguments:

Firstly, it is argued that those who ‘fall away’ are the ones who are not truly born again or those who are not truly saved. They only operate under false assurance or pretend to be believers. Their falling away is evidence that they were not believers since all true believers will continue to the end. Continuing to the end is therefore the evidence that anyone is a true believer. This argument is predicated on the following Bible passages that say in part that Christ “will not lose any given to him by the Father” (Jn. 6: 38 – 40); that the saved will “never perish” and no one can snatch them from my hands” (Jn. 10: 27 – 29).

Secondly, it is argued that true believers have ‘eternal life’ (Jn. 3: 36; 5: 24; 6: 47; 10: 28; and I Jn. 5: 13). By its very nature, eternal life is unending life. Thus whoever gets eternal life will live forever. That life by its nature cannot come to an end or be lost.

Thirdly, it is argued that in Paul’s teachings, it is clearly stated that those in Christ will not be condemned (Rom. 8: 1) but have passed unto life. They are justified and glorified (Rom. 8: 30) which implies an accomplished matter and they are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1: 13 – 14).

Another important argument put forward by the Reformed theologians in support of eternal security of the believers is that in I Pet. 1: 5, Apostle Peter tells his readers that they are those “who by

⁹ Ibid, p. 5

¹⁰ Letham, Op. Cit., p. 571.

God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time".

The foregoing provides a summary of the teaching of Reformed theology on eternal security of saints or believers. Our next course of action is to consider Ephesians 2: 1 – 10 and its teachings on predestination and eternal security.

IV. **An Exegesis of Ephesians 2: 1 – 10**

We begin the exegesis of this passage by first of all situating it properly in its context. The writer of the epistle, whether a Paulinist or Paul himself, wrote a general letter to churches in the neighbourhood of Ephesus.¹¹ In the letter, many Pauline doctrines are presented in a general manner. In the first two chapters of the letter, the author after giving thanks for the glad tidings he had received about the Ephesians, how they had exhibited faith in the Lord and love for one another was moved to say some prayers for them. One of the prayer points was that the Lord may enlighten their hearts so that they may know God's incomparably great power for those who believe, among other things. That power, the writer said, is like the working of mighty strength of God, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come (Eph. 1: 15 – 21).

Clearly, the theme, which the writer is pushing through in chapter 1: 19 onward, is the working of God's mighty power¹². However, prior to this, he has raised the issue of God's predestination of the saints in 1: 4 – 14 by pointing out that believers are chosen to that path of salvation even before the foundation of the world through God's lavish grace and love and are sealed by the Holy Spirit which serves as a guarantee (ἀρραβών) or down payment for the inheritance of eternal life. He deals with the theme of God's mighty power to the end of chapter one. When we get to chapter two, we find that the author is not yet through with the theme he has discussed to the end of chapter one. As such, the division of the chapters here is arbitrary. In

¹¹ K.L. Barker and J.R. Kohlenberger III, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: New Testament*. Abridged Ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994, p. 749 – 51.

¹² F.N. Boare, "The Epistle to the Ephesians" in *The Interpreter's Bible*, 10: 638. Ed. By G.A. Burtrick et al. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981.

fact, chapter two in merely provides an elaboration on chapter one.¹³ Chapter 2: 1 – 10 recapitulates the theme of redemption in chapter 1: 7 while 2: 11ff. elaborate on the theme of reconciliation raised in 1: 10, 22 – 23.

Talking about the mighty power of God, the writer of the epistle adds that just as that power raised up Christ and seated him on God’s right hand of authority, so also it works in all the members of the church, raising them from the death of sinful self-indulgence and seating them with Christ in the heavenly places.¹⁴ Thus in verse 1 of Chapter 2, the Ephesians are reminded that they were dead in transgression (τοις παραπτωμασιν) and sins (ταις αμαρτιας). They, in fact, walked in transgression and sin, meaning that they lived in them, following the ways of the world (age) and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, Satan¹⁵. Verse 3 brings everybody under the swoop of sin including the writer of the Epistle with the phrase ‘all of us’ (ημεις παντες). The word flesh (σαρκος) is a Pauline word, which refers to the human weakened state, brought about by the fall. It implies that in the old sin nature or fallen state, our depravity has rendered us so weak that the only way to describe our condition is to say that we “were dead in sin or transgression”. This captures a cardinal doctrine of Christianity, namely, total depravity. To the Reformed theologians, this ‘death of sin’ is so absolute that there is no trace of good left in man in the flesh as the will to do good becomes imprisoned in weakness or depravity. Mankind therefore, depends completely on God for their salvation. While the Arminians agree to the total depravity of humankind, they argue that human will aided by God could still respond in faith to salvation.

Verses 4 and 5 answer to what was raised in v.1. viz, “you were dead in transgression and sins” but ... God who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ... by grace (4 and 5 NIV). The reasons the writer gives for the salvation of believers are God’s great/much love and His rich mercy – thus the conclusion “it is by grace”. The verb συνεζωποτησεν (made alive together with) ‘is in the aorist indicative and refers to an action that is punctiliar or finished once in

¹³ K.L. Baker and J.R. Kohlenberger III, *Op Cit.* p., 756.

¹⁴ Boare, *Op Cit* p. 638.

¹⁵ See 2 Cor. 4: 4 where Satan is said to be the god of this world.

the past, while *σεσωσμενοι* is nom. pl. masc. participle perfect passive of *σωζω*, meaning to save. In this perfect form, it connotes an accomplished action, which would imply that the salvation of the believers is a *fait accompli*.

Verse 6 continues to describe what God's mighty power in Christ has done for the believers. Apart from making them alive with Christ, it has also raised them up and seated them up with Christ in the heavenly places (*συνηγειρεν και συνεκαθισενεν*). Again all these verbs are aorist in form denoting finished action in the past. As captured by Boare, "the thought is not expressed in terms of a future expectation, but of a spiritual transformation already made effective¹⁶. The reason for this action of God is to demonstrate His immeasurable love to posterity.

When we come to verse 8, the writer of the Epistle states in categorical terms what he mentioned in passing in verse 5 and what he had raised in chapter 1 that we have been saved by grace through faith (*τη γαρ χαριτι εστε σεσωσμενοι δια πιστεως*). Grace means unmerited favour. It is that which is given freely and therefore, a free gift, at the expense, however, of the giver. This verse presents a little difficulty in interpretation. The first part of the sentence contains two expressions that could serve as the antecedent to the second part. In Greek it is presented thus: *τη γαρ χαριτι εστε σεσωσμενοι δια πιστεως* i.e, for by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this is not from you (your doing) it is a gift of God. The two are salvation and faith. The difficulty lies in what the writer refers to as God's gift; is it salvation or faith? The demonstrative pronoun *τουτο* appears ambiguous in this statement. It could refer to both 'saved by grace' and 'faith'. But what exactly it refers to cannot be determined except by a careful examination of the context and a study of the original language of writing, Greek. Some have taken gift in the passage to be salvation while others have taken it to be faith. The latter is the position of Reformed Christians. They argue that faith is the nearest antecedent to the demonstrative pronoun 'τουτο' (this) and so is the antecedent. In their own reckoning the

¹⁶ Boare, *Op Cit.* p. 640.

verse should be read thus “you have been saved by grace through faith, and this (faith is) not from yourselves, it is God’s gift.”

Those who advocate that ‘salvation’ is the gift being referred to in the passage would have the verse read thus: “For you have been saved by grace through faith, and this (salvation is) not from yourselves, it is God’s gift.

The only way to solve this problem is to correctly identify the antecedent of the pronoun *τουτο* (this) in the passage and to read it along with the 9th verse of the passage. Here, Zeller’s exegesis would provide a very useful aid. As it goes, the demonstrative pronoun *τουτο* is supposed to point out the thing that it refers to. Apart from that, it is supposed to agree with its antecedent in gender and number while its case is to be determined by its function in the clause¹⁷. However, a consideration of the passage reveals that ‘*τουτο*’ is neuter in gender while *πιστεως* is feminine in gender. This disagreement in gender is very significant in determining the antecedent of the pronoun *τουτο*. This is because if the writer had intended to say that faith is a gift of God, he would have used the feminine form of the demonstrative pronoun, *αυτη* since faith is feminine in gender. This would have made it crystal clear that faith is the antecedent being implied. Apart from that in Greek, it is not word order but the function of words in a sentence that determines meaning¹⁸.

The pertinent question which Zeller decisively deals with concerning the demonstrative ‘*τουτο*’ is why the writer opted for the neuter gender. According to him, (Zeller), the antecedent is an idea (that of being saved). It will be noticed that in the passage, the noun ‘salvation’ (*σωτηρια*) is not used but the idea of salvation (*εστε σεσωσμενοι*). Thus, that idea of being saved could be referred to as ‘this thing’, which is the normal way of translating *τουτο* when it stands alone. In this manner, it is therefore “perfectly normal and appropriate to use the neuter gender thus: ‘by grace are you saved through faith, and this thing that I’m talking about, namely, salvation, is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God’”. Zeller argues further that to say “this thing” the neuter pronoun is the right one to be used. This

¹⁷ See J. Wenham, *The Elements of New Testament Greek*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965, P. 30 – 31.

¹⁸ *Ibid*

pronoun *τοῦτο* commonly takes a conceptual antecedent (Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics by Daniel B. Wallace, p. 335). *τοῦτο* therefore refers to the idea of salvation in the passage and not faith.

A reading of *τοῦτο* as salvation in the passage along with verse 9 would further demonstrate the appropriateness of this interpretation. Thus, “for you have been saved by grace through faith, and this (salvation is) not of yourselves, it is God’s gift (This salvation) is not of works, lest anyone might boast” (Eph. 2: 8 – 9). Conversely, a reading of *τοῦτο* as faith would show the inappropriateness of that interpretation. Thus, “For you have been saved by grace through faith, and this (faith) is not of yourselves, it is God’s gift. (This faith) is not of works, lest anyone might boast.” This makes it obvious that faith is not the antecedent as it is anomalous to say that faith is not of works. The New Testament clearly shows that it is salvation that is always said not to be of works and not faith¹⁹. Apart from the foregoing, an examination of New Testament usage of the word gift reveals that nowhere else in the New Testament is faith said to be a gift. The word ‘gift’ has been used of eternal life in Jn. 4: 10 and Romans 6: 23; of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2: 38, 8: 20, 10: 45 and 11: 17; of Justification in Rom. 5: 15, 17 and of Jesus Christ in 2 Cor. 9: 15, but no where of faith. This would lead to the conclusion that *τοῦτο* in Eph. 2: 8 refers to salvation and not faith.

The last verse of our study passage concludes this pericope by asserting that we are not saved by works because “we are ‘God’s workmanship’ (Gk *ποίημα*), created in Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” The word ‘workmanship’ (Gk *ποίημα*) means a work of art or a design. This would imply that God has specially designed those who are to be Christians and consequently, those who do good works, well in advance. This takes care of the allegation that true believers in Christ continue to be saved even when they misuse grace and adopt sinful lifestyles.

To sum up on the exegesis of Eph. 2: 1–10, it would appear obviously that the scriptures teach that God has predestined the salvation of those who eventually get saved. Since the Greek word

¹⁹ See Rom. 3: 20, 28; 4: 2 – 5.

(προοριδζω – *prooridzo*) translated ‘predestination’ means “to know or declare in advance by God’s foreknowledge” it would seem to me that taking a queue from Rom. 8: 29 which says that “those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son,” this predestination depends on God’s foreknowledge regarding those who get saved.

V. **An Interaction with Wayne Grudem’s Theology of Eternal Security/Perseverance of the Saints**

In his book *Systematic Theology: an introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, W. Grudem has aptly defended the doctrine of eternal security in a style that is concordant with the general Reformed approach. In this section, which concludes this paper, I would like to interact with his arguments raised in that book. This may not involve everything he has said but just those salient issues that may need to be reconsidered.

The first argument that may need to be revisited is Grudem’s argument (and all Reformed theologians with him) that ‘no one shall snatch the (believers) out of my hand’ is to be taken to include the person in the Lord’s hand²⁰. This appears to be a forced interpretation since the reference does not talk about the person in the Lord’s hand. The reference is to God’s protective authority over external forces and not to the person being protected. Thus, since the continued security of the child of God depends on his continuance to exercise faith, and if this faith is not coerced, then the individual may decide to stray. It has been argued that God continues to give the believer grace to continue to have faith in order to persevere. However, this question may be raised; if God’s grace is so effectual, why does it not also apply over the issues of temptation and sin? Why does God’s grace not prevent believers from being tempted and falling into sin? Could it be that the grace of abiding is stronger than the grace of sanctification? It may appear that if God does not absolutely prevent the believer from committing sin, then it might follow that He does not absolutely prevent them from escaping away from His security.

The second argument which may also need revisiting is that about the giving of the Holy Spirit as a seal (*arrabon* Eph. 1:13–14).

²⁰ W. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: an introduction to Biblical Doctrine* Leicester: IVP. 1994, p. 789.

According to Grudem, the Greek word ‘*arrabon*’ is a legal and commercial term meaning “first installment, deposit, down payment or pledge”. It is a “payment, which obligates the contracting party to make further payments.”²¹ This interpretation, we must agree, is right. However, one question may still be asked: Could it be established that in the commercial practices of the Greeks or Romans, there were no instances where contracts were broken even after the transaction was completed? If there were revocation of concluded contracts, which I suppose, what precludes the abandonment of a contract simply because a down payment had been made? Might there not be conditions under which the “*arrabon*” notwithstanding the contract had to fail such as the inability of the bidder/buyer to produce the rest of the money, or the demise of the seller? If some conditions prevailed for revocation of the contract, then, the same could apply to the salvation transaction contract. A very good case of the revocation of a spiritual contract is the Old Testament covenant that God made with Israel. This was sealed with blood and yet God revoked it when the Israelites failed to fulfill their own part of the contract. This may serve as a precedence of God’s attitude towards such contracts.

The third argument to be considered is that which says that according to I Peter 1: 5 God through His power guards the believers through faith against escaping out his kingdom and against external attacks. Grudem admits, “God’s power does not work apart from the personal faith of those being guarded, but through their faith”²². One may wish to know what is meant by ‘the personal faith’ of those being guarded. Is it the same faith that God ‘gives’ them as a ‘gift’ and which is not given to others who don’t believe? Or is it a faith arising from their free will? If the former, then there may be a need to establish how that faith can be said to be personal and if the latter then it means human responsibility plays some role in salvation.

The fourth argument is that about some verses such as Matt. 10: 22, Col. 1: 22 – 23 and Heb. 3: 12 – 14 which Grudem interprets to mean that Jesus and the other writers were merely warning the believers not to fall away in the time of temptation and that some of

²¹ Grudem, *ibid*, p. 791.

²² Grudem, *Ibid*

the people Paul was addressing in Colossae were unbelievers²³. The problem with this kind of interpretation is this: if believers do not fall away and cannot fall away, it amounts to share waste of space and words to warn them against falling. Thus the fact that the believers are warned against falling implies that they could fall away.

Another passage which Grudem interprets inappropriately is Jn. 15: 1 – 2, 6 that talks about branches that bear fruit and those that do not bear fruit and are cut away. According to Grudem, fruitlessness of those cut branches is an indication that there is no life in them. This is a forced interpretation because it is not fruitfulness that proves that a tree has life. A tree may be alive without bearing fruit if the environment is unfavourable for fruit bearing. A simple practice of agriculture will prove this. Moreover, the original intent of the passage was not to teach that there are false believers but rather to encourage believers to endeavour to be fruitful. And if as argued by Grudem, those branches were not part of Christ, then there would be no need to cut them away from Christ.

The last issue to be raised with Grudem's Reformed arguments has to do with his interpretation of Heb. 6: 4 – 6 that talks about those who have tested the heavenly gift, (and) partakers of the Holy Spirit, the power of God's word and of the age to come – if they become apostates..."²⁴. Grudem tries to show that the word 'enlightenment' in the passage simply means understanding without commitment, and that the word 'taste' means mere trial without acceptance. This interpretation is, however, not natural and does not suit the context in which the writer is speaking. The writer talks about experience and not just mere head knowledge and mere trial. The writer knows enough to decipher between mere head knowledge and enlightenment with experience. He could not have used such a word, as "taste" if he meant to say that those he was addressing had no saving experience. But the greatest problem with the interpretation is the fact that the writer says "if they fall away or become apostates" and that it is impossible to renew them "again". People fall away only if they were standing and no one becomes an apostate unless if he had

²³ Ibid. 793

²⁴ Grudem, p. 796 – 7

once believed in a particular religion. Moreover, that, they cannot be made to repent “again” means they had once repented and become believers. That is the reason why their apostasy is considered as ‘an open shame’ to the Lord. If unbelievers refuse to believe, that is no open shame to the Lord! Thus Grudem may need to revisit his interpretation of this passage.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it may be said that what the interpreters of the Bible need to be able to get around this problem of eternal security is to let go of the poise to defend their denominational dogmas and objectively consider this issue. Anything other than this will keep fueling the divisive fire.

Response:

Ephesians 2:1-10: The Irrevocable Nature of Salvation

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Carl Judson Davis, *The Name and Way of the Lord. Old Testament Themes, New Testament Christology* (JSNTSup 129; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

He has researched and presented the following papers:

Carl Judson Davis, "Prepositions and Christology: How the Littlest Words Bankrupt Evolutionary Christologies," presented at the 2009 Southeast Regional meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society;

Carl Judson Davis, "The Irrevocable Nature of Salvation: The Soteriology of 1 Thessalonians," in *Testamentum Imperium* 2 (2009): http://www.preciousheart.net/ti/2009/36-066_Davis_Soteriology_1_Thessalonians.pdf

Carl Judson Davis, "Acts 2 and the Old Testament: The Pentecost Event in Light Babel, Sinai and the Table of Nations," presented at the 2008 Evangelical Theological Society and forthcoming in *Criswell Theological Review*;

Carl Judson Davis, "Passover and the Metanarrative of the Bible: Exodus 12 and Leviticus 23 in Light of the New Testament," presented at the 2007 Evangelical Theological Society;

Carl Judson Davis, "Thorns and Thistles in the Metanarrative of the Bible: From the Curse of Eden to the Crown of Thorns," presented at the 2007 Southeast Regional meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, summarized as Jud Davis, "The Splendor of Thorns," in *Answers in Genesis* 4 (2009): 3:62-65;

Carl Judson Davis, "Where is the Garden of Eden? A Biblical-Metanarrative Study of Special Rivers and Paradise," presented at the 2006 Evangelical Theological Society.

I would like to thank Dr. Toryough for his contribution to *Testamentum Imperium*. He has done a very good job presenting his view of the data in Ephesians 2, Paul and the New Testament. In fact, I think he has presented his position about as well as it can be presented. However, there are several points on which I would like to take issue with him, and these issues lead me to an opposite conclusion from him.

Outline

1. General Points of Disagreement with Touryough
 - A. Not answering the one real question
 - B. Making sense of all the texts of Scripture
 - C. The nature and function of warning texts
 - D. The nature of Biblical exegesis and current failures
2. Ephesians and the whole Bible
 - A. Details from the text
 - B. Repentance and Faith are gifts from God
 - C. "Willing" is a gift from God
 - D. The Story of the Bible
3. Conclusion

General Points of Disagreement

Not Answering the One Real Question

The key question about soteriology is: Does the Bible teach that all men are equally tainted by the pollution of Adam's original sin, or not? This is the key question about which all others revolve. And there are, in reality, only two possible answers to this question. One is yes, and thus salvation is by God's effective, sovereign grace to absolutely sinful and totally unworthy people. The other answer is no, and thus there is something apart from God inherent in person themselves which makes that person more prone to believe. There is no middle ground. It is by the sovereignty of God alone, or the determining and decisive factor is something outside of God in the person themselves. John Piper recently said it very well in a sermon on Sovereign Grace which I paraphrase: If you stand before God, and he says, Why are you here when your twin, your sibling, your spouse,

or your neighbor is not?²⁶ There are only two responses: 1) "There was something in me that let me believe and hang on while others, fools that they are, disbelieved or let go and went to hell," or, 2) "Grace, sovereign grace, your grace alone, only grace, ever grace, always grace!" Which of those two answers sounds more in accord with the clearest teaching of the whole Bible?²⁷ Which of those answers would produce saved people who will never boast of anything in themselves but only boast in the Lord?²⁸ Which of those will produce a diverse people unified around sovereign grace in their worship of God alone?²⁹ Clearly, the second answer is the right one. However, if Dr. Touryough is correct, the first answer would be the answer of Scripture. For if Touryough is correct, it must mean that there is something apart from God and therefore in the individual which enables his will to respond. But what is this thing that makes a man able to respond to God while other men do not? Scripture says willing itself is a gift from God (see below, Phil. 2:13). Touryough never deals with this fact. Perhaps he has not realized the import of his logic, but such an affirmation (necessitated by his position) must be answered. It is not in his paper. When one says, "Free will!" The question still remains, What makes one person's will any different from another person's will? Are not all men from the same tainted lump (Rom. 9:21)? Dr. Touryough may not have asked himself this question, but the answer can only be God, or something inherent in the person. And if his answer is, "Something inherent in the person," what makes this so? Are some people just inherently more prone to believe than others? Are they smarter? Are they inherently more spiritually attuned to God? Surely, just asking these questions should bring to mind a host of verses which say, "No!"

²⁶ See the sermons on sovereign grace at <http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TopicIndex/105/>.

²⁷ Teaching like: Gen. 6:5-7; 8:21; Deut. 29:2-4; 2 Chr. 6:36; 1 Kings 8:46; Job 15:14-16; Ps. 5:9; 14:2-3; 36:1-4; 51:5; 53:1-3; 143:2; Eccl. 9:3; Isa. 1:9-10; 53:6; 59:4-16; Jer. 13:23; 17:9; 23:14; Matt. 7:16-20; 15:19; Mark 7:21-23; 10:18; Luke 18:19; Rom. 3:10-23; 9:29; 1 Cor. 2:14; and Gal. 3:22 to name a few.

²⁸ Rom. 4:2; 1 Cor. 1:29; 4:7; and Eph. 2:9. Notice 1 Cor. 4:7 carefully.

²⁹ This is the point of Romans and why Paul spends so much time on sovereign grace. He thought that it would unify a divided church.

Making Sense of All the Texts

The task of theology is to see how one passage of Scripture relates to other passages of Scripture. It also tries to organize the clearest and most important passages first. How does this page of text relate to that page in light of the whole? Dr. Touryough rightly points out the handful of difficult passages for the supporters of sovereign grace. This is good, and Dr. Touryough calls for such interpreters to answer these hard questions. The problem, however, is that in calling these passages into question, he leaves unanswered the hundreds pointing to sovereign grace. How do all these which seem to point to sovereign grace alone apart from anything in man, find explanation? And, if he is right, why have so many (the worth of whom God has proven by their prominent place in history) seen the doctrine as the clear teaching of Scripture and one of the keys to spiritual growth?³⁰

If predestination is based on God's foreknowing who would believe (as Touryough claims), why did not Paul say that in Romans 9? It would have hushed all objections. Paul does not say it because it is not the Biblical answer. How would such a teaching bring together a racially divided Roman Church? Sovereign grace would because all equally are saved by grace alone, nothing in themselves. Paul does not defend Romans 9 as does Dr. Touryough. Paul says rather, "Who are you to talk back to God?" (Rom. 9:20). Paul's reasoning only works if he is talking about sovereign grace in election apart from anything--free will included--in man. Election based on foreseen faith would not be a problem for anyone because it does not offend then humble man's pride like the doctrine of sovereign grace does. Sovereign grace alone is the exclusive and only home of a "no boast" salvation.

Moreover, Touryough does not deal with or perhaps does not know the Biblical background of God "knowing" a person. Consider Gen. 18:19 כִּי יִדְעֵתִי לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יַצְוֶה אֶת־בְּנֵי.

³⁰ Consider the following proponents: Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Charles Spurgeon, John MacArthur, D. James Kennedy, John Piper, R. C. Sproul, Matthew Henry, Martin Bucer, Heinrich Bullinger, Huldreich Zwingli, John Knox, John Bunyan, Theodore Beza, Francis Schaeffer, Al Mohler, Mark Dever, Mark Driscoll, Tim Keller, B. B. Warfield, Wayne Grudem, Carl F. H. Henry, John Gill, Donald A. Carson, Martin Lloyd-Jones, William Carey, Greg Beale, Charles Hodge, Lewis Sperry Chafer, J. N. Darby, C. I. Scofield, John Gerstner, George Whitfield, John Broadus, John Owen, and George Müller just to name a few.

translations say: "I have chosen him (ESV, NET, NAU, NIV, NRS, RSV, JPS), "I have singled him out" (NJB, NLT, TNK), "I have made him mine" (BBE). And these translations are surely what the verse implies, but look carefully at the Hebrew. It does not literally say "chose." It says, "know" (so KJV, NKJ, JPS, ASV, ERV, GNV, DBY, YLT, WEB, RWB). Even the LXX and the Vulgate recognize that יָדַעְתִּי has to do with "knowing" and thus not literally translated "have chosen." God knew Abraham in a way he did not "know" other people, and it was an electing knowledge, not an election based on knowledge of foreseen good works (see passages like Deut. 4:37; 7:7; John 15:16, 19; Rom. 9:6-16 especially v. 11).

Similarly see Amos 3:2 רַק אֶתְכֶם יָדַעְתִּי מִכָּל מִשְׁפְּחוֹת הָאָדָמָה. The ESV renders this, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." Clearly these two usages show that God "knowing" someone does not mean knowing something about them; for God knows all things and the hearts of all people (Isa. 37:28; John 2:25). God knowing someone here means God loving, God choosing, God having a relationship with. Jesus has the same meaning of "know" when he says to the damned, "I never knew you" (Matt. 7:23). Certainly he knows their actions since he judges them. His "knowing" the elect means something different. Consider carefully Gen. 4:1, וַיֵּדַע אָדָם אֶת־חַוָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ, "Adam knew Eve his wife." Certainly he knew facts about her before; they had both sinned and just gotten banished from the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1-24). "Knowing" here means intimate relationship. And if that is true, what would it mean Biblically for God to "fore" know someone?

Dr. Touryough's explanation of foreknowledge is the standard Arminian interpretation of the Romans 8:29, but it will not stand up to careful scrutiny of the text. Touryough's argument requires that God foreknow who would have faith and who would not. But the text does not say that. It says,

ὅτι οὓς προέγνω, καὶ προώρισεν συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνης τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν πρωτότοκον ἐν πολλοῖς ἀδελφοῖς,

"whom he foreknew also he predestined to be conformed to the image of his son so that he (the Son) might be the firstborn among many brothers." Look carefully at what this says. All who are foreknown

end up conformed to Jesus. None drop out; therefore, foreknowledge cannot mean knowing who would and would not have faith. That is not what the text says.

Moreover, it does not square with the context of the whole Bible which affirms that God does not pick the likely but the unlikely, not the strong but the weak, not the spiritually living but the dead, not those with good hearts but bad (1 Cor. 1:26-28; James 2:5; Deut. 7:7; Ezek. 36:22-36). In fact, the Bible explicitly says that Touryough's way is not how God works (Rom. 9:11; 11:5-7; Eph. 1:4-5; 2 Thess. 2:12-13; Tit. 3:5; Deut. 7:7-8). It is those who find grace in God's eyes who become then righteous people (look carefully at the Hebrew of Gen. 6:1-8, and then 9), not the other way around. Touryough is making the claim that the Arminian explanation of election is right, but if so, he must take his own advice and answer all the texts which are hard for him, and they are myriad.

The Nature and Function of Warning Texts

I agree whole-heartedly with Dr. Touryough's point that Scripture never promises salvation to those who willfully live in violation of God's commands (Deut. 29:18; Eph. 5:5-8; Ezek. 13:10; Gal. 6:7-9; Col. 3:5-6; Rom. 8:1-6). However, I see the nature of warning texts differently from him. God's purpose in the warning texts is for those very texts to be the necessary means of grace to the elect. When he says that those who persist in sin will be lost, God means that absolutely. It is as true as John 3:16 or any other verse in the Bible. There is nothing unreal about it. But, those warning texts work this way. The elect will heed those warnings every time and, therefore, avoid evils spoken of in those texts. Those with inadequate faith, temporal faith, faith--quote unquote, will always presume on God's grace and demonstrate by their actions the inadequacy of their so-called faith (like Judas, Simon Magus, those who leave Jesus in John 6:66, and those supposed Christian leaders of Matt. 7:21-23). Warning texts are God's way of showing to the visible Church those who are the elect and those who are pretenders, only dabbling in the faith. It is not that they were truly elect, truly believed and then changed. Rather, the circumstances proved who they were all along.

How do you know wheat from tares (Mark 4:3-9)?³¹ Look at the fruit. How do you know the seed in good ground (that is, ground prepared and protected by a farmer)? Look at the fruit. The tare was never a wheat. The temporal was never the ground prepared by the farmer. Can a bad tree bear good fruit (Luke 6:43; Matt. 7:17-18; 12:33)? No, you must first make the tree good (Matt. 12:33 compared to 7:20-23). Warning texts separate the bad from the good, but the bad were always bad. The good have been made good by God and will heed his voice. Were those of Matt. 7:21-23 ever known by Jesus? Jesus says they were not, even though they had done things like preach in his name and perform miracles. Is this not the "tasting" but falling short of which Hebrews 6 speaks?

Those who fall away are thus more guilty because they knew more and experienced more than those who had tasted nothing of God's goodness. This would include the likes of Judas who tasted so much of God, even worked miracles by his power, cast out demons in his name just like the non-Christian seven sons of Sceva (Acts 19:14), saw all of Jesus' miracles, heard all of his teaching, yet then fell away (Matt. 10:1, compare 7:22). Judas shows us a natural, fallen man, who will not believe in spite of all that God did for him externally. If God left any of us alone, we would all be Judases to the core.

This brings to light a difference I have in terminology with Dr. Touryough. I believe that the elect are eternally secure, but I prefer "perseverance of the saints" rather than "eternal security" as the way to describe and think of this truth. Eternal security applied to a people before they have died and in spite of what they do, leads many to a view of salvation that says, "It does not matter what I do." The New Testament never says that to anyone. Rather, the language is, "Make your calling and election sure" (2 Pet. 2:10), "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling because God is the one at work in you" (Phil. 2:12-13). "I beat my body and make it my captive, lest somehow having preached to others I become rejected" (1 Cor. 9:27). The saints will persevere; the rest will prove the false nature of their belief.

³¹ In regard to this parable, look carefully at the Biblical background to "ears to hear" (Mark 4:9) and the Old Testament (Deut. 29:3).

The Nature of Biblical Exegesis and a Modern Failure

Dr. Touryough falls into a modern trap concerning the nature of Biblical exegesis. In times past, and in other disciplines, one mastered the meaning of a text by carefully reading and rereading the text. In Classical Greek (in which I was trained), we did not read books about Homer or Plato or Aristotle or Herodotus. We just read texts in the original language until the words seemed to come out of our very pores. We mastered the text by studying the primary texts first, carefully in the original languages. We spent ninety-nine percent of our time in the primary documents.³²

When I entered Biblical Studies, I found a different world altogether. There, to become an expert, one was to spend ninety-nine percent of one's time in secondary literature. Books about the Bible were first and foremost the domain of scholars. Exegesis meant exercising the arguments of others rather than mastery of the text and details in the original language. Dr. Touryough apparently falls into this trap because so much of his essay is interacting with the literature of others rather than careful, firsthand analysis of the text. I would encourage any seeker to sit down with the text and read the whole making a list of all the texts pointing to sovereign grace. I would encourage readers to look at the implications of Paul's words. It is to that task in Ephesians I would like to turn now.

Ephesians and the Whole Bible

Details from the Text

The details of Ephesians clearly point to the idea of God's sovereign grace in salvation. Paul says in Eph. 1:3, Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς ... ὁ εὐλογήσας ἡμᾶς ἐν πάσῃ εὐλογίᾳ πνευματικῇ ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ἐν Χριστῷ, "Blessed be God . . . the one having blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ."³³ Paul thought the totality of the Christian life was due to God blessing Christians. Paul conceives of this as an aorist action which one may well translate literally "the one having blessed" or in easier English

³² See the comments of C. S. Lewis on this point in, St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation. The Treatise De Incarnatione Verbi Dei* (Trans. and ed. C. S. M. V., with an Introduction by C. S. Lewis; Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 3-10.

³³ All translations of the Greek and Hebrew are my own unless otherwise indicated.

"who has blessed" (so ESV, NET, NAU, NIV, NJB, NLT, NRS, RSV). One may well ask, Does this blessing include "faith"? Eph. 6:23 makes clear that the answer is yes because Paul's wish prayer benediction asks for "Peace to the brothers and love with faith from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" Εἰρήνη τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς καὶ ἀγάπη μετὰ πίστεως ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Notice very carefully, Paul prays for peace and love from God for the Ephesians. That is, Paul thought that God the Father and Jesus were/was the one to supply peace and grace. But look very carefully at what he adds, "with faith." Paul prayed to God that peace and love with faith be granted by God to the Ephesians. Faith clearly in Paul's mind is something that comes from God. It is therefore part of the "every spiritual blessing" in 1:3. We will develop this idea more a little later.

Look closely at 1:4-11. Notice the words, ἐξελέξατο ἡμᾶς ἐν αὐτῷ πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους, "He elected us (lit., picked us out) in him before the foundation of the world so that we would be holy and blameless." Can a person be holy and blameless without faith? Scripture says, "Without faith it is impossible to please him" (Heb. 11:6). Does this text not presuppose God granting faith? Consider the words προορίσας ἡμᾶς εἰς υἰοθεσίαν διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς αὐτόν, κατὰ τὴν εὐδοκίαν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ, "having predestined us into adoption through Jesus Christ into himself, according to the good pleasure of his will." "Predestined" has to do with boundary markers in Greek.³⁴ This text says that God marked a boundary off with us inside before the world began. Moreover, that boundary marker was not done because of something in us; rather, it was according to his good pleasure (see too Rom. 9:11; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 3:5). Notice the words ἐκληρώθημεν προορισθέντες κατὰ πρόθεσιν τοῦ τὰ πάντα ἐνεργούντος κατὰ τὴν βουλήν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ, "We were made heirs (aorist passive) having been predestined (aorist passive) according to the purpose of the one

³⁴ ὀρίζω is the Greek verb related to ὄρος boundary, so Max Zerwick and Mary Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament* (Unabridged, 5th, Revised Edition; Rome: Loyola University Press, 1996), 578; *BDAG*, 723; and *LSJ*, 1250-51. Thus, the meaning is to boundary off from something else.

working all things according to the counsel of his will." This does not sound like election based on foreseen faith. This sounds most naturally like election based on God's sovereign choice. This verse is just like 2 Thess. 2:13,

ἀδελφοὶ ἠγαπημένοι ὑπὸ κυρίου, ὅτι εἴλατο ὑμᾶς ὁ θεὸς ἀπαρχὴν εἰς σωτηρίαν ἐν ἁγιασμῷ πνεύματος καὶ πίστει ἀληθείας,

". . . brothers having been loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits into salvation by means of sanctification of the Spirit and by faith in the truth." God chose you as firstfruits; he made the mechanism of the choice faith and the Spirit's sanctification, both of which God provides according to the most natural understanding of the grammar of this verse. In a similar way, notice 1:15-16,

Διὰ τοῦτο καὶ γὰρ ἀκούσας τὴν καθ' ὑμᾶς πίστιν ἐν τῷ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην τὴν εἰς πάντα τοὺς ἁγίους οὐ παύομαι εὐχαριστῶν ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν μνησίαν ποιούμενος ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μου

"I, having heard of the faith in you all, . . . have not stopped giving thanks." Paul thanks God that the Ephesians have faith. Now, if faith is something that comes from a person apart from God, why would Paul (as he does in many of his letters) thank God that someone had faith.³⁵ Moreover, even if faith comes from God's general prevenient grace with the decisive part being added by man's free will, why would Paul thank God precisely for the part coming from man? The reason Paul thanked God for the faith of the Ephesians is because Paul knew that God was the one who had worked that faith in the spiritually dead. When he saw evidence of real faith, Paul knew that God was the one who had worked that faith. Paul came into the light and confessed with John on the authority of Jesus that all his good works are done "in God" (John 3:21; Eph. 2:10; Phil. 2:13).

It seems to me 1:19-20 may connect the power of God and the ability of a person to believe. Paul is saying that the same power which raised Christians from being spiritually dead, is that same

³⁵ Rom. 1:8; Eph. 1:15-16; Col. 1:3-4; 1 Thess. 1:2-3, 2 Thess. 1:3; 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:3-5.

power which raised Christ from being physically dead. But notice that this power is related to "us, the ones having believed" ἡμᾶς τοὺς πιστεύοντας. Notice that this belief in Greek is κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τοῦ κράτους τῆς ἰσχύος αὐτοῦ, "according to the working of the might of his strength. I.e., Paul thought that their faith was according to the power of God. Why would Paul say this unless he thought that faith was somehow finally, decisively, and effectively empowered by God?

Notice the identification of Christians before God's grace as being dead. Can a dead man really respond to God as Touryough, Pelagius, all the semi-Pelagians and Arminians claim? Does not "dead" imply most naturally a complete inability? And if that is true, it makes the content of 2:8 very clear. Take a very careful look at 2:8, καὶ τοῦτο οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν, θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον. The whole context is literally in Greek, "By grace are you having been saved by faith (perfect passive), and this thing is not from you, it is the gift of God." Many have been quick to argue that τοῦτο is neuter, lit., "this thing," and therefore is not "this faith." Touryough is correct here. But when he goes on to say "this thing" refers to the having been saved excluding faith, he has missed the mark. What has not occurred to him is that "this thing" is most naturally taken as "this whole thing"--being saved, having faith all of it-- is God's gift.³⁶ It seems very

³⁶ The history of interpretation of this verse (including its understanding by native Greek speakers) squarely rests with the idea of including faith in the concept of the gift. Mark J. Edwards, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians* (ACC NT vol. 8; Downers Grove: IVP, 1999), 133, writes, "JEROME: Paul says this in case the secret thought should steal upon us that 'if we are not saved by our own works, at least we are saved by our own faith, and so in another way our salvation is of ourselves.' Thus he added the statement that faith too is not in our own will but in God's gift. Not that he means to take away free choice from humanity . . . but that even this very freedom of choice has God as its author, and all things are to be referred to his generosity, in that he has even allowed us to will the good. EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS 1.2.8-9." Edwards, *Galatians*, 133, "FULGENTIUS: The blessed Paul argues that we are saved by faith, which he declares to be not from us but a gift from God. ON THE INCARNATION 1." Edwards, *Galatians*, 134, "CHRYSOSTOM: Then, so as to do no injury to free will, he allots a role to us, then takes it away again, saying *and this not of ourselves*. . . . Even faith, he says, is not from us." F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1961), writes, "Commentators are not agreed about the exact reference of the words 'and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God'. Do they refer expressly to faith, or more generally to salvation? It is true, in either case, that we could never exercise saving faith did not the Holy Spirit 'persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel' (to quote the *Westminster Short Catechism*). But the fact that the demonstrative pronoun 'that' is neuter in Greek (*touto*), whereas 'faith' is a feminine noun (*pistis*), combines with other considerations to suggest that it is the whole concept of salvation by grace through faith that is described as the gift of God. This, incidentally, was Calvin's interpretation, although many of his followers have preferred to take faith itself as the gift of God here." See similarly, Andrew T. [Footnote continued on next page ...]

difficult to avoid the grammatical implications of this.³⁷ And if Touryough is wrong about this verse, his whole argument collapses. Footnote 36 shows that those closest to the original language and culture of Ephesians 2 affirm that "this thing" includes not excludes faith.

A similar point appears in 2:10. "We are his workmanship having been created in Christ Jesus for good works." It seems very difficult to argue that faith is not a good work. And if it is a good work, then it was created by God in advance. Elsewhere in Paul, faith is listed as a fruit of the Spirit, i.e., a fruit that the Spirit provides just like the others: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness (lit., faith *pi,stij*), gentleness, self control" (Gal. 5:22-23).

Furthermore, it is possible that διὰ τῆς πίστεως αὐτοῦ in 3:12 is not an objective genitive but rather a subjective one. The NET has this note:

A decision is difficult here. Though traditionally translated "faith in Jesus Christ," an increasing number of NT scholars are arguing that *pi,stij Cristou* (*pistis Christou*) and similar phrases in Paul (here and in Rom 3:22, 26; Gal 2:16, 20; 3:22; Phil 3:9) involve a *subjective* genitive and mean "Christ's faith" or "Christ's faithfulness" (cf., e.g., G. Howard, "The 'Faith of Christ,'" *ExpTim* 85 [1974]: 212-15; R. B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ* [SBLDS]; Morna D. Hooker, "Πίστις Χριστοῦ," *NTS* 35 [1989]: 321-42). Noteworthy among the arguments for the subjective genitive view is that when πίστις takes a personal genitive it is almost never an objective genitive (cf. Matt 9:2, 22, 29; Mark 2:5; 5:34; 10:52; Luke 5:20; 7:50; 8:25, 48; 17:19;

Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC 42; Dallas: Word, 1990), 112; Markus Barth, *Ephesians. Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1-3* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1974), 225; Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians. And Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002). For Touryough to be right, it would mean that the above interpretation is wrong. All of it is a gift, but not faith. This is precisely what Paul is not saying. He is saying Christians were dead and were made alive by God. Therefore, Christians cannot claim anything as coming from themselves. See similarly 1 Cor. 4:7.

³⁷ S. M. Baugh, "Ephesians," in the *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 2265, n. 2:8, writes, "The Greek pronoun is neuter, while 'grace' and 'faith' are feminine. Accordingly, 'this' points to the whole process of 'salvation by grace through faith' as being **the gift of God** and not something that we can accomplish ourselves. This use of the neuter pronoun to take in the whole of a complex idea is quite common in Greek (e.g., 6:1); its use here makes it clear that faith, no less than grace, is a gift of God. Salvation, therefore, in every respect, is **not your our doing**."

18:42; 22:32; Rom 1:8; 12; 3:3; 4:5, 12, 16; 1 Cor 2:5; 15:14, 17; 2 Cor 10:15; Phil 2:17; Col 1:4; 2:5; 1 Thess 1:8; 3:2, 5, 10; 2 Thess 1:3; Titus 1:1; Phlm 6; 1 Pet 1:9, 21; 2 Pet 1:5). On the other hand, the *objective* genitive view has its adherents: A. Hultgren, "The *Pistis Christou* Formulations in Paul," *NovT* 22 (1980): 248-63; J. D. G. Dunn, "Once More, PISTIS CRISTOU," *SBL Seminar Papers, 1991*, 730–44. Most commentaries on Romans and Galatians usually side with the objective view.

If the subjective genitive is right, "through Christ's faithfulness," it is possible that this forms the reason for the faithfulness in Christians. Just as God made the woman out of the rib, bone, and essence of Adam, so too God has built the faithfulness of Jesus into his bride who thus becomes bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. Notice that Paul is starting down this path of explanation in Eph. 5:29-32 by connecting Jesus and Church with Gen. 2:24.³⁸

Another important section is 3:16-17,

ἵνα δῶ ὑμῖν κατὰ τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ δυνάμει κραταιωθῆναι διὰ τοῦ πνεύματος αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον, κατοικῆσαι τὸν Χριστὸν διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν, ἐν ἀγάπῃ ἐρριζωμένοι καὶ τεθεμελιωμένοι.

This is translated, "in order that he might grant to you ... for Christ to dwell in your hearts through faith, having been rooted and grounded in love." Notice that this is a prayer. Paul prays for love, knowledge and for Christ to dwell through faith. If, in the final analysis, faith is decisively from the person, why is Paul praying that God would do this through faith? Rather, the faith Paul is talking about in 3:18-21, is the supernatural faith of Hebrews 11 of which Christ is the one who starts it, and Christ is the one who finishes it (Heb. 12:2) ἀφορῶντες εἰς τὸν τῆς πίστεως ἀρχηγὸν καὶ τελειωτὴν Ἰησοῦν, "looking away to Jesus the author (NAU) /founder (ESV) /initiator (Peshitta, CJB) /the one who initiates (NLT) / [is the] source [of] (GWN) and who perfects our faith."

³⁸ For an interesting discussion of Eph. 5:29-31, see Frank S. Thielman, "Ephesians," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 826-28.

Repentance and Faith are Gifts in the Bible

Dr. Touryough makes the comment that faith is never in the Bible conceived as a gift from God, but the good Doctor has not read his Greek text carefully enough for it teems with passages implying that faith is a gift. Look at James 2:5, οὐχ ὁ θεὸς ἐξελέξατο τοὺς πτωχοὺς τῷ κόσμῳ πλουσίους ἐν πίστει καὶ κληρονόμους τῆς βασιλείας, "Has not God elected the abjectly poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom?" How can God choose the poor to be rich in faith if faith comes from the person himself? The reason the poor have faith is because God chose them to be rich in faith. Rom. 12:3 says, ὡς ὁ θεὸς ἐμέρισεν μέτρον πίστεως, "just as God gave a measure of faith." How do these Christians have a measure of faith according to the text? God measures it out to them. 1 Cor. 12:9 speaks of the extraordinary gift of faith as being from the Holy Spirit. Moreover, Paul thanks God when someone has faith (Rom. 1:8; Eph. 1:15-16; Col. 1:3-4; 2 Tim. 1:3-5; 1 Thess. 1:2-3). Why would Paul thank God for something, according to Touryough, that does not come from God? Faith is explicitly called a fruit of the Spirit in Gal. 5:22. Does love come ultimately from one's own heart? Does joy? Does peace? Does patience? Does kindness? Does goodness? Does faithfulness (lit., in Greek, faith)? Does gentleness? Does self-control? Faith clearly here is something that comes decisively and effectively from God not from the man. 2 Pet. 1:1, τοῖς ἰσότιμον ἡμῖν λαχοῦσιν πίστιν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, "to those having received by lot faith of equal honor with us in righteousness of our God and savior Jesus Christ." The verb here is λαγχάνω, and it means "receive," "obtain by lot", "be appointed/chosen by lot" (see BDAG and LSJ). Consider the translations: NET, "have been granted", NAU, NIV, NJB, NRS "have received", NLT "This faith was given to you." Furthermore, consider 1 Cor. 3:6, "I planted. Apollos watered, but God gave the growth." Look at Acts 18:27, παραγενόμενος συνεβάλετο πολὺ τοῖς πεπιστευκόσιν διὰ τῆς χάριτος "when he was present, he assisted greatly those who had believed through grace." Notice, "they believed . . . through grace." Read Phil. 1:29, ὑμῖν ἐχαρίσθη τὸ ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ, οὐ μόνον τὸ εἰς αὐτὸν πιστεῦν ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ πάσχειν "it

has been granted you for Christ not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him." Notice here Paul explicitly says "believing in Christ . . . has been granted to you." 2 Pet. 1:3, πάντα ἡμῖν τῆς θείας δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ τὰ πρὸς ζωὴν καὶ εὐσέβειαν δεδωρημένης "his divine power having given to us all things pertaining to life and godliness." Is faith not a part of all things here? Can a Christian live life and be godly without faith? Then notice it says, "all things."

If repentance is a necessary part of faith (which it is), consider these verses: Acts 5:31, δοῦναι μετάνοιαν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ "to give repentance to Israel." Notice closely Acts 11:18, ἄρα καὶ τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ὁ θεὸς τὴν μετάνοιαν εἰς ζωὴν ἔδωκεν "so then God gave repentance unto life even to the Gentiles." Observe carefully 2 Tim. 2:25, μήποτε δώη αὐτοῖς ὁ θεὸς μετάνοιαν εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν ἀληθείας "lest ever God may grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth." If repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin, clearly both those sides according to the Bible are gifts from God.

The Source of a Willing Choice

Those wishing to escape the humbling force of these verses often rest their hopes on "free will." It is free will, they say, which makes the difference. It is free will why one chooses and another does not. It is free will why one perseveres and another does not. But to say these things only answers half of the question. The real question remains, Where does this free will come from? And the Scripture is very clear: it comes from God. Look at Phil. 2:13, θεὸς γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ ἐνεργῶν ἐν ὑμῖν καὶ τὸ θέλειν καὶ τὸ ἐνεργεῖν ὑπὲρ τῆς εὐδοκίας "The one providing the energy in you (pl.) for both the willing and the working is God. *He does this* according to his good pleasure."³⁹ From where does this vaunted "free will" to choose God

³⁹ Peter T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians. A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991): 287, writes, "The God who mightily raised his Son from the dead now by his indwelling Spirit effectively works in the Philippians to supply both the determination to obey his own gracious purpose and the power to carry it out. . . . The logical subjects of these infinitives are the readers, that is, the recipients of the exhortation *katēgagēzēsque* ('continue to work out') in whom God is effectively at work. It is they who are to will and to achieve, precisely because God is at work in them. . . . Such an inward and *persistent* resolution by the Philippians is due to the effective divine activity. Furthermore God so works that their inward resolve is carried into effect, as *evnergei/n* makes clear." F. F. Bruce, *Philippians* (NIBC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), writes, "When the Spirit takes the initiative in imparting to believers the desire and the power to do the will of [Footnote continued on next page . . .]"

come? The Biblical answer is God. Your willingness to accept God comes from God according to this verse. Your willingness to have faith comes from God according to this verse. See similar passages (Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36:22-36; John 3:37; 2 Cor. 3:5; Heb. 13:21; 1 Kings 8:58; 1 Chr. 29:14; Ezra 1:1, 5; 7:27; Ps. 110:3; 119:36; 141:4; Prov. 21:1; John 6:65 and especially 6:66).

The Story of the Bible

The story of the Bible is not God finding out who would believe and then blessing them because of their ability to believe. Rather, the story of the Bible is God decreeing that man by his free will would choose to reject God, and that God would have sovereign mercy on the undeserving. God is doing this (Eph. 3:10), so that the entire world (angelic, demonic, unredeemed, and redeemed), might know the greatness of his name. The purpose of this is humility before God (4:2).

The story of the Bible is God allowing a man by his free choice to spiritually murder the entire human race. All of Adam's offspring confirm everyday Adam's rebellious choice. God would have been ever so just to send the entire lot including you and me to Hell. But he chose not to do that. He purposed that through his Son, God would take to himself human flesh. He would come to a tree. He would be stripped naked, and then, in a culminating act of massive obedience after a lifetime of perfect obedience to his own law, he would by that obedience, spiritually unmurder all those who, though equally tainted by sin, by God's grace would come and believe and undeservedly go to Heaven. These contrast those who continue to ratify Adam's choice and deservedly go to Hell. We wanted to be God, to make things right, God became a man. He even gives great and precious promises by which we may become partakers of the

God, then that desire and power become theirs by his gift, and they do his will 'from your heart' (Eph. 6:6). J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians. A Revised Text with Introduction, Notes, and Dissertations* (London: MacMillan, 1927), writes, "[καὶ τοῦ θελήματος] 'not less the will, the first impulse, than the work, the actual performance.' 'Nos ergo volumus, sed Deus in nobis operatur et velle; nos ergo operamur, sed Deus in nobis operatur et operari,' Augustin. *de Don. Persev.* 33 (x. p. 838, ed. Ben.). It is not sufficient to say θεὸς ἐστὶν ὁ ἐνεργῶν, lest he should seem to limit the part of God to the actual working: this activity of God comprises τὸ θέλειν as well as το, ἐνεργεῖν. The θέλειν and the ἐνεργεῖν correspond respectively to the 'gratia praeveniens' and the 'gratia cooperans' of a later theology."

For a defense of "good pleasure" being God's, see O'Brien, *Philippians*, 288-89; and Bruce, *Philippians*, 83.

divine nature (2 Pet. 1:3-4), even though we, through and through, are so unbelievably unworthy. Any other view does not make sense of the whole Bible and therefore should be rejected.

Conclusion

Dr. Touryough has done a good job pointing out the weakest and most poorly defended parts of the Reformed outlook on New Testament soteriology. These are the places that need the most careful thought and the most clear explanations. However, to conclude with him that these texts overturn the clear teaching of the text elsewhere is simply unwarranted. Moreover, the text is clear in its presentation of salvation as the sovereign gift of God who enables faith in the absolutely undeserving. Therefore, his call is irrevocable for the elect.