



The Ascent of Lost Man in Southern Baptist Preaching

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Lords of Chaos

Where Do They Come From? Reflections on Sin and Evil

Tom Ascol

April 30th, at 11:00 PM, a thirty-two year old Ft. Myers, Florida High School band director was murdered with a shotgun blast to his head when he opened his front door to one of his students. After he was dead, the murderer shot him again, intentionally desecrating his body. Even those who have been greatly desensitized to brutality by the regular news media reports of man's inhumanity found this crime particularly heinous.

Over the next week community-wide grief turned to horror and unbelief as police investigators began to unravel the most sinister and incredible scheme that Southwest Florida has ever witnessed. They discovered that this teacher had been murdered by a gang of high school students who call themselves the "Lords of Chaos." This gang was responsible for a recent string of crimes that included arson, burglary & armed robbery. They called their eighteen year old leader, "God." Furthermore, when they were arrested they were in the process of preparing for a trip to Disney World where they intended to carry out elaborate plans to steal life-sized costumes of cartoon characters. Once dressed in these costumes, they planned to walk about the park randomly shooting black people with silencer-equipped handguns.

The ensuing analyses of these tragic revelations have collectively provided an interesting study in contemporary perspectives on sin and evil. One obvious observation is the contemporary ignorance of the relationship between these two realities. Yet, as the Bible teaches and experience confirms, sin and evil are so inextricably bound together that you cannot begin to make sense of the latter without a serious understanding of the latter.

Through the influences of both theological and secular humanism the modern American mind long ago jettisoned any belief in human depravity. Thus, as Rabbi Kushner has widely taught, when bad things happen it is "good people" who must grapple with the question of "why?"

His views simply reflect contemporary thinking, which, when it comes to the issue of evil inevitably begins with the presupposition that man is basically good. After all, look at the many beneficial things the human race has accomplished. We are constantly reminded of the vast advances being made in science, technology, medicine, and education. Surely the examples that can be cited from these and other fields of human endeavor reflect a nature that is, at least, pretty good.

This assumption renders one ill-prepared to deal with the reality of moral evil in the world. Explanations must be sought from places other than the human heart. So the blame is usually placed on some kind of social deprivation. The arguments which are offered from this wrong-headed perspective are hardly tenable, much less convincing.

Lack of education is frequently suggested as the rationale behind the basically evil actions of basically good people. It is incredible that this argument has so many adherents given the fact that today more people have received more formal education than at any time in our nation's history. Should we not expect to see less crime today than ever before if this theory is accurate? In addition, does not Ted Kaczynski, the Harvard educated, Berkeley experienced "Unabomber" illustrate the lunacy of such a notion?

Poverty is another common answer put forth to explain why good people do bad things. If only poverty could be wiped out, then the crime and evil which blight impoverished areas would also disappear. If this theory were true then the era of the Great Depression should have seen the highest crime rates in American history, which, of course, was not the case. Financial privilege cannot eradicate evil. Erik and Lyle Menendez, who brutally murdered their millionaire parents in Beverly Hills, put the lie to that silly idea.

It is simply impossible to make sense of the reality of moral evil in the world apart from the Bible's teaching on sin. This is not to suggest that all of our questions are answered in what the Bible says. Some things God has chosen not to reveal (Deut. 29:29), such as why He allows evil to exist in the first place. But that which the Bible does teach makes perfect sense of the world. It fits the facts.

So then, what exactly does the Scripture say? How can it help us gain a proper perspective on something as insidious as the Lords of Chaos?

Scripture begins with the reality of man's fallenness. What happened in the garden of Eden was a genuine tragedy. Sin wreaked havoc on man's previously righteous and innocent nature. That one act of disobedience plunged the whole human race into a state of moral and spiritual depravity. As the Second London Baptist Confession puts it, all people are now "wholly defiled, in all the faculties, and parts, of soul, and body." The Bible is clear--sin has turned every member of the human race into a rebel against the Creator.

Even in the days of Noah *"the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually"* (Gen. 6:5). The Prophet Jeremiah confirms this judgment: *"The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?"* (Jer. 17:9).

The Apostle Paul draws on Old Testament teaching to make the same point about the whole human race in startlingly graphic terms: *"There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one." "Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit;" "The poison of asps is under their lips;" "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; Destruction and misery are in their ways; And the way of peace they have not known." "There is no fear of God before their eyes"* (Rom. 3:10-18).

Obviously, Paul had not read, *I'm OK, You're OK*. Neither had he imbibed the theological humanism which has so deeply infiltrated contemporary Christian thinking. This Pelagian malady has found a haven within our own Southern Baptist ranks. Those who doubt it need only consider some of the bitter reactions of so-called moderates to the recent public affirmation of human depravity by Dr. Mark Coppenger, President of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

In a Virginia Baptist evangelism conference, President Coppenger decried the modern notion that men are basically good in nature. Rather, he declared, they are "bad" (which he went on to explain in terms of sin and rebellion). A Baptist state paper editor accused him of employing "the language of hate" while a Texas pastor charged him with having the attitude of the Pharisees. If nothing else, such protests illustrate clearly that human depravity extends to the mind.

Moderate complaints notwithstanding, the Bible teaches that, because of sin, men are naturally opposed to God and God's law. Lawlessness, then, is the standard conduct of this fallen world.

When this native lawlessness breaks out in a particularly heinous expression of vileness and brutality, it cannot be written off as some odd quirk of nature. It cannot be explained away by pointing to some external force. The source of the problem lies much deeper than that. Once due consideration has been given to the various influences on human behavior, this central truth stubbornly remains--simply stated in Scripture and amply illustrated in human history: the heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart. And the problem of the human heart is that it has been ravaged by sin. And the only answer to sin is Jesus Christ.

Thank God that the Lords of Chaos stand out because they are exceptions and not the norm. But do not be deceived about why this is so. It is not because of poverty, lack of education or any other social ill. Their actions are the consistent outworking of sin--rebellion against God.

Why, then, is not everyone a Lord of Chaos, or a Jeffrey Dahmer, or a Ted Bundy or an Adolph Hitler? Because God, in His sovereign mercy, usually restrains most of His rebellious image bearers from going that far in expressing their sin. Like a rider who "gives the horse his head," God does on some occasions loosen the reins with which He holds back the degenerative pull of human depravity (Rom. 1:18-32). The consequences are always disastrous. That's the nature of human sin.

Viewed in this light--the light of Scripture--it is amazing that there are not more Lords of Chaos menacing society and that this world is not a field of blood. The seeds which blossomed into brutal violence and murder in them are planted in every human heart. What makes you or me different from them? The mercy and grace of God. Nothing more.

Granted, this is a hard truth to swallow. But it is the truth. It is much more psychologically satisfying to explain away the notoriously wicked among us in terms which are far removed from our own circumstances. If we can distance ourselves from them and convince ourselves that "they" really are not in any way like "us," then we can sleep easier at night. It is the sleep, however, of the drunkard, who so dulls his senses that he falls into a stupor. The truth, ultimately, cannot be denied. The very same sin nature which moves some to commit the most atrocious of crimes resides within every man, woman and child.

It is a shattering realization.

During WW II Adolf Eichmann was Hitler's top angel of death. From 1939-1945 he was in charge of exterminating Jews in Germany. Over six million Jewish people were murdered under his efficient administration. After the war he escaped to South America, where he lived until he was found and arrested by the Israeli secret police in 1960. Eichmann was extradited to Israel where he was put on trial for the atrocious crimes he committed against the Jews.

One of the survivors the Holocaust was Yehiel Dinur. He was called on to testify against Eichmann at the trial. When Dinur confronted Eichmann in the Israeli courtroom, he began to shout and sob uncontrollably, finally collapsing to the floor. Everyone assumed that his reaction was caused by the memory of the horrible atrocities of the death camps in Nazi Germany. However, in a later interview Dinur explained that that was not the reason at all. Rather, he said, when he saw Eichmann he expected to see him as the personification of evil itself, some kind of moral monster. But, as he gazed into Eichmann's eyes, he realized for the first time that sin and evil are the natural human condition. Dinur said, "I saw that I am capable to do this...exactly like he."

Eichmann was not a madman. Dahmer and Bundy were not sociological mutations. The Lords of Chaos are not monsters.

How are we to think of them? As enslaved sinners. And the same sinful nature which erupted so heinously in their lives is possessed by every child of Adam at birth. To see this and to believe it is to be brought to your knees just like Yehiel Dinur.

Against this black velvet backdrop the grace of God in Jesus Christ shines as a brilliant diamond radiating hope to our utterly depraved world. Through His life, death and resurrection, He has conquered sin and all the powers of evil. By the work of His Spirit, He changes human hearts and makes men new. As Lord of lords He overcomes chaos and will soon appear to eradicate evil forever.

Therefore, in the face of moral evil, in the midst of human suffering and sorrow, with faith let us look up and lift up our heads, because our redemption draws near.



The Ascent of Lost Man in Southern Baptist Preaching

[Mark Coppenger](#)

Introduction

By the most conservative estimates the Southern Baptist Convention has had at least 88,000 preachers over its 151 year history. Even after the growth patterns of the denomination are taken into consideration, it is still safe to estimate that during the last century-and-a-half, more than 120 million Southern Baptist sermons were preached![\[1\]](#)

In light of this, it is impossible for anyone to presume to summarize exhaustively the history of Southern Baptist preaching in any respect. This article is no exception. It is, rather, a survey based upon the examination of several hundred sermon-collection books in the Southern Baptist Historical Commission library.

In reading through these sermons, an interesting connection suggested itself. It is presented here not so much as a theory, but as a program for study. Could it be that the perception of lost mankind's character and capability are improving in our preaching, much as they have in our doctrinal statements? Could it be that the unregenerate are being progressively perceived as less depraved? The evidence indicates that there has been an ascent of lost man in the thinking of Southern Baptists over the course of their history.

Does preaching generate the confessions? Or do the confessions shape the preaching? Or does it work both ways? To what extent does one influence the other? While these questions cannot be answered with absolute certainty, the parallels are worth watching.

When we read the 1859 *Abstract of Principles* of Southern Seminary, we find that lost man inherits a "nature corrupt and wholly opposed to God and His law." Sixty-six years later, the first *Baptist Faith and Message* said men "inherit a nature corrupt and in bondage to sin." The 1963 revision stated that men "inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin." One wonders how a fresh revision might read in the year 2025? If the theological trajectory remains the same, perhaps in the 21st century men will be said to "inherit a nature open to sin as an option."

While there have probably been millions of Southern Baptist sermons preached, relatively few have found their way into print. And relatively few of those have found their way into our historical library. Still, that collection makes for an interesting sample.

Ante-bellum Preaching

Ante-bellum preacher Charles D. Mallery explains the doctrines of grace in his sermon on Ephesians 1:3,4, "The Doctrine of Election."[\[2\]](#) This founding trustee of Mercer University defined election as

God's free, sovereign, eternal and unchangeable purpose to glorify the perfections of his character in the salvation of a definite number of the human family by Jesus Christ, without regard to any foreseen merit or good works on their part, as the ground or condition of this choice.[\[3\]](#)

His account of depravity serves as a clear benchmark of early Southern Baptist views:

The scriptural doctrine of depravity is not that every man is as bad as he possibly can be, for there may be indefinite progression in guilt:--nor that one man is necessarily as wicked as another,--for there may be as many shades of depravity as there are sinners in the universe. But it teaches us that man, by nature, is destitute of all holy principles and desires; that there is nothing in his character which is pleasing in the sight of God; that being alienated in his heart from God, corrupt in the very fountain of action, in the temper and spirit of his mind, all the actions that he performs, even those which are in themselves excellent and lovely, are still the service of an alien and a rebel, and consequently an abomination in the sight of heaven. Every imagination of the thought of his heart is only evil continually.[4]

In this light, he went on to observe, "The want of power is the want of will....the sinner's inability is the sinner's crime." [5]. A trustee of Mercer University from its founding in 1833 until his death in 1864, Mallary represented mainstream Baptist thinking in his day.

Virginia pastor Addison Hall joined in this grim assessment of unregenerate man in a sermon specifically addressing the topic:

The doctrine of human depravity is fundamental, and lies at the very foundation of the Christian Religion; insomuch as a practical conviction of its truth, may be considered as the first step towards the reception of the offered mercy of the gospel. By it we understand that man by nature is wholly corrupt and depraved; not only destitute of love to his Creator, but actually opposed to his laws, and at war with his perfections: that man's whole nature and attributes, animal, intellectual, and moral, are perverted. His understanding is darkened, his imagination beclouded, his memory impaired, his reason dethroned, his will perverse, his conscience defiled, his affections estranged, his heart polluted. In his thought he is impure, in his words filthy, in his actions vile. In short, that he is 'earthly, sensual, devilish.' ...This humiliating doctrine is confirmed by the history of all nations and religions, whether Pagan, Mahommedan, Jewish, or Christian; else why those scenes of war, of rapine, and bloodshed, that fill the pages of history, sacred and profane?...A steadfast conviction of this doctrine is necessary, to tear away from self-righteousness man the leaf-covering of his own righteousness, and to make him see himself in all his native deformity and pollution, that so he may duly value the atoning righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.[6]

Georgia pastor J.H.T. Kilpatrick answered a variety of objections to the doctrines of grace, He responded to those who charge that the doctrine of human depravity diminishes human responsibility:

Others, again, excuse themselves thus: they say it is their nature to sin, and they cannot see how any one can be blamed for acting according to his nature; and especially as he got this nature from another. Therefore, such persons appear to think they are quite excusable in sinning against God; purely, because it is their nature to do so; but let us try this mode of reasoning and see whether it will do. Suppose a man is arraigned in a court of justice for the crime of larceny, and his attorney or counselor urges before the court and jury, as his only plea of exoneration: that this poor unfortunate man is a thief by nature; it is his nature to steal, and that he always had been a thief at heart, &c., and moreover, his father was a thief, and this man, poor fellow, is just like his father; and therefore, he hopes the court and jury will find a verdict of acquittal for the prisoner; in as much as it is his nature to steal, &c. We ask, what do you think of such a plea as this? Do you think it would stand? Or rather, do you not think this man intended, through his counselor, to insult the court, and sink himself still lower, if possible, in the estimation of all who know him? Make the application, my dear objector, and tremble before God for having insulted him in like manner." [7]

Our first president, W.B. Johnson, similarly had little patience for the lost who refused to take responsibility for their own spiritual destiny:

Now, now, O fellow-sinners, you have it in your power to place yourselves under influences that are spiritual and saving; or under influences that are carnal and damning. You can read the Bible, or the book of infidelity; the sermon of truth, or the novel of fiction; you can attend the party of sinful pleasure, or the meeting for holy prayer; you can go to the midnight revel, or to the house of God. You can lift up the prayer of the publican, or the howl of the bacchanal. You can utter the praise of the Most High, or belch out the blasphemy of the arch fiend. How solemn the responsibilities that are upon you! [\[8\]](#)

Returning to Kilpatrick, we find a lack of enthusiasm for much that appears to be religious interest within lost man:

Here is a man, for instance, who is very sick, he greatly dreads to die; his physician proposes to him to take a potion of very nauseous medicine, the patient is perfectly willing, and greatly desires the medicine. We ask, Is it really, the medicine the man wants, independent of its effects? O no, the medicine itself is disagreeable; it is the good effects of the medicine which is really the object of his desire. He wants to live, and he only desires the medicine as the means of obtaining the end. This, perhaps, unfolds the secret of your situation. If so, you are only a legalist; and it has not been religion you have been wanting all the while, but its good effects. If you will examine yourself closely, perhaps you will find that so far from having desired religion on account of what it is in its own nature, you have in reality been desiring it only as a kind of necessary evil, which you did not want, only as a means of obtaining certain wished-for ends....We see a great many persons who appear to be greatly concerned about keeping out of hell and getting to heaven, while they appear to be very little concerned about sin and holiness. [\[9\]](#)

In an 1860 sermon collection, Reverend W.T. Ussery of Union University underscored the magnitude of man's lostness with these words:

It may take more power to redeem fallen man than it did to create this material world. It required the combined power and wisdom of the God-head to save man, while the Father merely spoke this world into existence....If the great, rich and eternal grace of God is required to save the human soul, how deep, inevitable and universal must be human depravity?[\[10\]](#)

Parenthetically, we should note that Calvinist apologists were just as hard on hyper-Calvinist's as they were toward Arminians. Adiel Sherwood, who organized the theology department at Mercer and wrote the resolution which resulted in the formation of the Georgia convention, called hyper-Calvinists "anti-nomians."

In a sermon entitled, "The Covenant of Redemption," he spoke of the doctrines of grace as "the system which acknowledges God as the author of salvation, the Spirit as the agent, and Christians as the means." In his estimation, it was "the only scriptural system."[\[11\]](#) But he was opposed to hyper-Calvinism, which scorned means:

Anti-nomians have been so fearful of trenching upon the Lord's prerogative of converting sinners, or that the set time to favor Zion had not arrived, that they have attempted but little....If they had been guided by the scriptures, they would have been "up and doing" long ago, for the same commission which authorizes them to labor in their own neighborhoods,--not only gives liberty, but presses the duty of preaching "the gospel to every creature."[\[12\]](#)

Late Nineteenth Century Preaching

After the war, toward the end of the century, there is still an allegiance to the notion of total depravity, but the preachers seem more concerned than their predecessors to mention "freedom." Consider Thomas Skinner's remarkable statement of depravity, of the bondage of the lost man's heart. But then note the closing qualifier.

The unconverted sinner's heart is fortified in his weakness, is desperately set in him to do evil, and all that converted men can do is to break upon them, as the sea breaks on the rocky shore. It is the sea that is sent back while the rock stands firm. There are scores of men who live for the flesh, and yet live in the full light of truth; men that are familiar with every statement and argument of the Scriptures; men that have known and seen much of the power of God in revivals, and yet there is within them that fixed, rooted, toughened life of sin that refuses to yield itself to any power which can be wielded merely by the hands of men.

If the Christian's strength be in the Lord and not in himself, then the Christless person must needs be poor, impotent creature, void of all strength to do anything towards its own salvation. The holy Spirit works in the saving of a sinner without impairing the freedom of the human will.[\[13\]](#)

W.P. Walker offered a similar account, with a strong statement of depravity: "In this slavery the mind is blinded, that truth cannot be seen. The affections are perverted that the truth is hated, and the will is paralyzed that it cannot be obeyed." [\[14\]](#) Given this "helpless and hopeless" condition, Walker noted the necessity of the Holy Spirit: "with his aid we can turn to God."[\[15\]](#) It may be significant that he says "with his aid" rather than "by his power."

This milder statement of the Holy Spirit's role accords with his claim, "There is no coercion in matters of religion. God's revelation to man is sufficient to convince his judgment, conquer his will, and win his love." [\[16\]](#) The listener is left to wonder what this could mean. On one level, it is surely false. Any number of people are exposed to God's manifold revelation of himself-- through the declaration of the heavens, the testimony of natural law, and the clear preaching of the gospel. Many refuse to respond to this revelation. Or is he speaking of an elective/irresistible "revelation?" If so, then why put it so? If he means simply that no one is dragged kicking and screaming into heaven, then that is true enough, but against whom is he arguing? If it means that somehow depraved man achieves saving heights of spiritual perception so that he might choose God on his own, then he makes his earlier statement of man's helplessness confusing.

It seems that the cords of man's bondage are just loose enough that he, Houdini-like, can, with the Holy Spirit's whispered urgings, swell his wrists and work enough slack to break free and grasp God.

As perplexing as this prose may be, it does show the tension involved in trying to hold to the biblical doctrine of total depravity while answering to the philosophical theme of freedom. As is noted below, some later preachers utterly abandoned the doctrine of total depravity and the tension collapsed.

Early Twentieth Century Preaching

Shortly after the turn of the century, there are clear signs of lost man's progress in Southern Baptist preaching. C.B. Williams, dean and professor of Greek New Testament and New Testament Theology at Southwestern argued that "man is worth saving morally and spiritually. This is his chief glory. Then let us build more churches, more Sunday schools, let us send forth more evangelists and missionaries to save this lofty being called man, spiritually and morally, in order that he may be lifted to the side of God in the Kingdom, though Jesus Christ, whose grace shall transform his character and light his life, until at last he may be like God Himself."[\[17\]](#)

Of course, the Bible teaches that man is a "little lower than the angels," that he is "fearfully and wonderfully made," but it does seem a bit much to speak of salvation as lifting a lofty being yet higher.

Williams is a fascinating and disturbing character. He seemed right susceptible to modern expressions. In "The Worth of a Man," he said "I believe in eugenics, the science of noble birth, the science which says we can produce a higher race by proper birth and by proper parentage." [\[18\]](#) In "Christianity for the Twentieth Century," he embraced a popular slogan ordinarily associated with theological liberalism: "This teaching of the New Testament on the fatherhood of God and the

brotherhood of man must be basal in the twentieth century Christianity." [\[19\]](#)

Despite his qualifiers and links to Scripture, these words reveal a man who is overeager to make Christianity "relevant." By this standard, talk of total depravity did not fare so well in his day.

In the same era, Southwestern Seminary president L.R. Scarborough suggested a good measure of freedom for lost man, building a sermon on Revelation 3:20 in the Laodicean letter, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." Despite the fact that this letter is directed toward one of the seven churches, Scarborough calls it "the simplest explanation of the plan of salvation encompassed in so brief a statement within the lids of God's Book." [\[20\]](#)

Mid-Twentieth Century Preaching

By the 1930's, the Reformed perspectives which permeated earlier Southern Baptist preaching had declined in influence. Southern Seminary president E.Y. Mullins, seemingly at odds with the anthropological article of the *Abstract of Principles*, preached these words:

You may choose to believe in God or choose not to believe. Again the choice is in the highest degree momentous. You may freely will to believe in God. Indeed, when we look at the spiritual nature of man closely it becomes quite evident the he is so made that faith is the natural or normal expression of his nature. There are certain deep instincts in him which cannot be evaded. They impel us to believe in God...in all these deeper impulses we find a vindication of his right to believe in God. Faith in God is his inalienable right. The instinct of thought and of conscience, the instinct of prayer and of suffering, the instinct of courage and of hope--all these vindicate man's right to believe. The whole make and trend of his soul impels him to God. [\[21\]](#)

A "right to believe?" What a curious construction, so unlike ordinary discourse. Stranger yet is M.E. Dodd's sermon on John 3:16, one of a series of sermons he preached on various 3:16's. He began with "GOD SO LOVED"--did not hate. It does not say, "I believe in you." He does. It does not say, "I trust you." He does.... [\[22\]](#) The point seems to be that God believes in and trusts mankind.

Texas executive secretary R.C. Campbell expressed similar enthusiasm in his sermon on Psalm 8:4, "God's Estimate of Man:" "God sees in us the ability to overcome our selfish desires and inclinations. It is an inspiring sight to see an individual who forgets himself in unselfish service for humanity." [\[23\]](#)

Well, it is true that there are stirring stories of non-Christian Medal-of-Honor winners who threw themselves on grenades for their buddies; and of unbelieving parents who slaved to give their kids an opportunity for a better life. But does the Bible justify speaking so sweepingly and generously of man's capabilities at the deepest level of motivation?

W.T. Conner, longtime theology professor at Southwestern Seminary, similarly mitigated man's depravity:

Jesus regarded men as sinful--all men--but He did not believe that men were fixed in their sinful state. He knew the love of God toward men, and He believed in the possibility of winning men to a favorable response to God's grace. ...Jesus did not believe, then, that man could lift himself out of his sinful state in his own strength, but He did believe that men could respond to God's grace and let God lift them out of their sins. It is true that this response was one that was won from the man by the grace of God offering to save man. Yet it was man's response. And Jesus counted on such a response on the part of sinful men. To some extent that was what He was finding. He welcomed such a response. He eagerly watched for it. He said there was rejoicing over it in the presence of the angels in heaven.

In befriending sinners, then, Jesus was not compromising with their sins. He was offering them a friendship that was calculated to win them from their evil ways. [24]

It seems a little strange to talk about Jesus's "believing," "counting on," "eagerly watching," and "calculating." Doesn't Jesus more nearly work in the realm of "knowing" and "effecting?" Intentionally or not, Conner presents a picture of man who, while not perfect, is perfectly open to the overtures of an amiable, gift-bearing divinity.

Moving into the 1940's, many other spokesmen for the liberty and even honor of lost men are easily found. M.F. Ewton of First Baptist Church, Seminole, Oklahoma, drew this boundary line:

God cannot go beyond man himself. Men are free moral agents, having the right and power of choice. Man can choose the highest heights of heaven or the lowest depths of hell. God will not, God cannot force men to love and serve Him because forced service is slavery. If men love and serve the Most High God, they will do it willingly. By the promptings of the Holy Spirit, by the faithful preaching of the Word, and by the testimony of Christian friends, the issue of eternal importance has been placed before you.your soul will perish in the regions of the damned unless you will to do the will of God. God cannot go beyond your own heart and its desire. If you remain hard of heart and stiff of neck then there is nothing that God can do. The matter rests with you. [25]

Is it not more appropriate to speak of the "promptings of the Holy Spirit" in the lives of the saints? For the lost, it would seem to involve more than prompting, for they have not yet consented to be actors in Kingdom drama.

Llew Northern, in his Broadman sermon book, *Simple Salvation*, claimed,

There is a longing in every man for acquaintanceship with the divine. This quality of man's nature may not always be known, but it is universally real. The further one advances in the progressive elements of life the more he feels the need of something that cannot be defined by the ordinary rules of expression and realized by the use that is made of material accomplishments.[26]

Now, it is easy to argue that men want security, significance, and heaven, but it is quite another thing to say that they want God as Lord. In Northern's sermon, we find little trace of the notion of man as a hardened rebel. And what could Northern mean by "advances in the progressive elements of life?" If he means "advances in spiritual sensitivity," then his statement is trivially true. If he means "advances in the arts, sciences, and civic virtues," then his statement is demonstrably false. Indeed, as men count themselves more progressive, enlightened, educated, and esteemed, they are prime candidates for spiritually ruinous pride.

Not surprisingly, the Jesus who seeks this advanced man is more supplicant than Sovereign. "In Jesus' standing at the door of the hearts of men knocking, one is struck with the valid significance of a symbol of man's character by finding that the Lord Jesus respects the privacy of the human soul. He does not batter his way into this privacy, nor resent a kind of barrier between man and him. Quite gently and lovingly he comes to the heart's door and knocks....He would enter to cheer, to counsel, to instruct. He would have an abiding place within the heart. He will await the opening of the door." [27]

South Carolina pastor W.P. Hall elaborated on the posture of the seeking Jesus in this fashion: "About what was Jesus optimistic? He was hopeful about His words enduring, the redemption and transformation of human personality, and the coming of His kingdom." [28] "If He had not been hopeful about redeeming lost men, He would not have come and sacrificed so much in order to do it." [29] An optimistic and hopeful Jesus? Well, yes. But should not more be said?

In another 1940's Broadman book, *Christ and Human Liberty*, Adiel Moncrief spoke of Jesus' view of man in these terms: "Belief in human liberty and in man's free institutions involves the greatest measure of faith in man. Jesus has that measure

of faith in man. He believes in the boundless possibilities of mankind to become free sons of God." [30]

Jesus has "faith in man." Had there been a denominational press 100 years earlier in 1840, it's doubtful that this expression would have received much play.

Broadman also published a 1940's collection by Zeno Wall, one in which he describes the Holy Spirit's work in salvation in these terms: "A sinner is hard of hearing. He, in fact, would never hear if the Lord did not unstop his ears. The Holy Spirit, therefore, takes the initiative in our salvation by unstopping our ears." Wall then goes on to say, "When you open your heart's door and bid the Lord to come in, you will experience something that you cannot explain." [31]

It's remarkable how strong the imagery of Revelation 3:20 plays in Southern Baptist evangelistic preaching. In this sermon, the sinner is portrayed as sitting in the house of his soul, deaf to noise of the Savior's knock. Perhaps "violating his privacy," the Holy Spirit slips in and clears his hearing. But then the question stands, why should the sinner want to answer instead of recoiling in fear or irritation, as some folks do when we go out on church visitation? Is hearing enough to prompt opening? It's not a bad image as far as it goes, but it leaves the question of will untouched.

Moving into the 1950's, we find yet other voices raised against the Reformed view of lost man. In a "Baptist Hour" sermon, Roy McClain declared that there are "no elect people" [32]. He pictured a wistful God who ever renews his invitation. "He puts perfume in the flowers with the hope that you will someday ask why." [33]

This God has done what he can, and now he waits hopefully for us to pick up on his cues.

Of course, one speaks of the Baptist Hour, Herschel Hobbs comes readily to mind. This venerable Southern Baptist statesman was emphatic in stressing human freedom over human bondage: "The devil and God held an election to determine whether or not you would be saved or lost. The devil voted against you, and God voted for you. So the vote was a tie. It is up to you to cast the deciding vote." [34]

Everyone is familiar with the practice of watching election returns, waiting to see how the vote went. It's difficult to imagine God's doing this sort of thing, even if done eons in advance of the actual vote.

To close the 50's we turn to yet another Broadman Book, *Southern Baptist Preaching*. In it Carlyle Marney's sermon on "The New Birth" provides the most generous view of man yet. Speaking of inquiring Nicodemus, he said, "He is blind with the awful spiritual blindness of all men who know only religious habit. He is blind to the indwelling Spirit, blind to his freedom, to his responsibility, to his spiritual destiny, and to the inner light." [35] Unless Marney is arguing that the inquiring Nicodemus was already regenerate, he pictures a lost man indwelt by the Holy Spirit—one who needs a happy discovery more than a conversion.

Contemporary Preaching

In the late 1970's, Broadman's fourth volume of Award Winning Sermons featured a sermon by Clay Warf on the prodigal son. Warf draws from William Hull in describing "the waiting of God as one that is filled with an agony compounded with fear and hope--each day hoping for the son's return yet each moment filled with fear that the son may destroy himself in the far country. But the fact is that no matter how close in pursuit of us God may be, he still chooses to wait until we turn and reach out to take his hand." [36]

What are we to make of this Heavenly Father wracked with fear that his son may not return? Never mind predestination. Whatever happened to prescience?

Warf applies this parable to every person, but in what sense do lost people possess sonship, prodigal or not?

In the 1970's, Southern Seminary professor Frank Stagg continued the assault on Reformed thinking in Southern Baptist life:

The 'Achilles heel' of 'predestination,' besides its monstrous and fallacious view of God as arbitrary, is that what it offers as 'salvation' is really destruction. Were God to determine that some be 'saved' and some be 'lost,' there would be no meaningful difference between the two groups or fates. Both groups would be lost. Both would be reduced to the status of things, objects manipulated. Salvation is not salvation for a person unless personhood itself be preserved. That is why Jesus asked the cripple, 'Do you wish to become well?'[\[37\]](#)

I fail to take the offense Dr. Stagg suggests I ought to take. Believing that I was an incurably self-indulgent, spiritually dead creature, I have nothing but gratitude to God for giving me a new heart and a heavenly destiny. These changes seem to me to constitute a "meaningful difference." If this be destruction, then may we see more of it!

Of course, a "person" is one who wills, who acts according to values and principles, and believers have all the personhood one could ever want, Stagg's claims notwithstanding. Stagg's lost man seems much finer than the lost man pictured the Abstract of Principles, which Stagg signed under some necessarily arcane interpretation.

Notable Exceptions

In fairness, it should be noted that Southern Baptist preaching does not chart a simple trajectory from total to lesser depravity. All along the way, there have been both words of esteem for lost man's capacities and, on the other hand, dismissive judgments on those alleged capacities. The question is not, then, one of discrete and exclusive eras, but of the shifting center of mass.

J.R. Graves was an early dissident from the Reformed view of man. In his 1847 sermon on the "The Sovereignty of God," he said:

The doctrine of eternal and unconditional election, and reprobation as taught by Calvin, and assented to by many professed Christians, we utterly repudiate--it finds no place in our faith and affections. It is as contrary to our reason as to our understanding of the Word of God...Either He will save some, who disbelieve the truth, and damn some who love our Lord Jesus Christ; or He must invincibly force some to love Him and some to hate Him, so that He might damn them. Both of which suppositions are contrary to the plain construction and spirit of the Bible, and effectually destroy all human accountability and moral agency.[\[38\]](#)

He went on to say that all predestination was based on foreknowledge, and then suggested that those foreknown to choose Christ were those of more worthy character.

Did He dispossess Himself for the time of His omniscience, close His eyes, and decree a certain quantity, instead of a certain character, for salvation? Impossible for eternal wisdom thus to act! What would you think of that man before whom was set a large measure full of gold coins and pieces of tin of the same size and, being freely offered all he chose, should--instead of carefully selecting the gold--should shut his eyes and be satisfied with clutching a handful of whatever kind it might be! Would an infinitely wise God thus discern between the righteous and the wicked?[\[39\]](#)

So Graves compared those who would ultimately be saved to gold coins on account of their superior moral character.

These are the ones with the sensitivity to recognize the worthiness of Christ, and so, naturally turn to him. Seeing their virtuous choice, God affirms this choice in advance-hence, predestination.

Graves acknowledged that the Bible teaches that the lost man is a slave to sin, but, he asks, "cannot the slave wish for freedom and release?" He goes on, "The slave may wish in vain, but the sinner has a deliverer to rescue him when he wishes. So to him the freedom of thought and of choice is still left." [\[40\]](#)

The problem with this image is that the master imprisons the literal slave. The spiritual slave imprisons himself.

Just as there were early Baptists who mitigated depravity, there are modern Baptists who underscore it. One could hardly imagine a more sober account of fallen man than this one offered by the incomparable R.G. Lee:

My own definition of the grace of God is this: the unlimited and unmerited favor given to the utterly undeserving. Let us think of the strength of grace. Sin is very powerful in this world. Sin is powerful as an opiate in the will. Sin is powerful as a frenzy in the imagination. Sin is powerful as a poison in the heart. Sin is powerful as a madness in the brain. Sin is powerful as a desert breath that drinks up all spiritual dews. Sin is powerful as the sum of all terrors. Sin is powerful as the quintessence of all horrors. Sin is powerful to devastate, to doom, to damn. [\[41\]](#)

Here is the sinner's only hope, although, until quickened by the Spirit of grace, he does not know it. No man can rescue himself from the tyranny of sin. Men may reform, but they cannot regenerate themselves. Men may give up their crimes and their vices, but they cannot, by their own strength, give up their sins. Can the Ethiopian change his skin? No. Can the leopard eliminate his spots? No. [\[42\]](#)

Elsewhere, Lee said, in contrast to Marney:

Nicodemus was blind and blind to the fact that he was blind. Nicodemus was ignorant--and ignorant of the fact of his ignorance. Nicodemus was dead--and dead to the fact that he was dead. Nicodemus was lost--and lost to the fact that he was lost. He did not know that unless men are converted and become as little children--not masters in scholarship, not philosophers of the academic grove--they cannot see the Kingdom of God. [\[43\]](#) Adam, the federal head of the race, plunged into sin and carried the whole human race with him. ...Nothing but regeneration will save this generation. [\[44\]](#)

Regeneration is the great change which God works in the soul when He brings it into life, when He raises it from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. It is the change wrought when the love of the world is changed into the love of God; when pride is dethroned and humility enthroned; when passion is changed into meekness; when hatred, envy, and malice are changed into a sincere and tender love for all mankind.

It is the change whereby the earthly, sensual, devilish mind is turned into the mind that was in Christ. The new birth is not the old nature altered, reformed, or reinvigorated, but a being born from above. ...[\[45\]](#)

It is not that the natural man is ignorant and needs instruction, feeble and needs invigorating, sickly and needs doctoring. His case is far more. He is spiritually lifeless, and needs quickening--a spiritual corpse which needs bringing from death to life. [\[46\]](#)

The necessity of the new birth is shown in that the human heart is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9), is affected with a malady which no example can cure, no philosophy can change, no ritualistic formulas or religious ceremonies can reach and change.

I repeat, the natural man, in his unregenerate state, cannot understand the things of the Spirit (I Corinthians 2:14). He is blind (II Corinthians 4:4); he is dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1-3); his understanding is darkened (Ephesians 4:18-19); full of evil thought (Genesis 6:5, Jeremiah 17:9), and unable to please God (Romans 8:8).

Therefore, as all who believe the Word of God know, a new birth, even a birth from above, is needed because of the depravity of human nature.[\[47\]](#)

So the unregenerate man has the eyes of his understanding darkened in respect to spiritual and saving truth. The stars of gospel truth shine brightly in the firmament of the word of God, but the lost man does not see them."[\[48\]](#)

And again, "The gospel is hated and rejected as foolishness until the direct power of the Spirit changes the governing disposition of the heart."[\[49\]](#)

Consider yet another "counter-culture" 20th century voice. J. Frank Norris' view of man required that even saving faith must come as a gift:

Now the New Birth, the Regeneration act, is not a human act, it is a Divine act. That's God's side. Now, repentance and faith are graces given of God, and they are an act of the human.... Now, don't be worried, if you get one of the two, you will have the other. They are both from the human side. The Divine side is the new Birth....So it is, which do you have first, repentance or faith? If you have one you have the other. Both are--let me emphasize, both are gifts from God.[\[50\]](#)

One final example is drawn from our contemporary, W.A. Criswell, who pulls no punches on the helplessness of lost man:

We are dead. We are corpses. We are born in that death. We are born in sin, even conceived in sin. All of our propensities and affinities flow in the direction of sin. We are by nature set in a fallen direction. Have you ever stood by the mighty Niagara? The great river falls over that precipice. It naturally does. It is uncoerced. It falls by nature. It cannot rise. It does not rise. It falls and each drop of water pushes the other over the rim of that great falls. We are set in a fallen direction....I am bound, paralyzed between two steel rails, one, my fleshly lust and the other, my fallen will. And I stand in the path of an inevitable judgment, inexorable death. I'm like a man paralyzed between two steel rails and thundering down on me is a great chain of cars....I can stand and preach to a dead corpse and say, "Don't you see?" But a corpse doesn't see. I can lift up my voice and say to a dead corpse, "Don't you understand?" But a dead corpse does not understand. I can say to a dead corpse, "Don't you hear?" But a dead corpse does not hear. It cannot will itself to a quickened life. It cannot choose, it cannot see, it cannot hear, it cannot think, it cannot understand. It is dead....The initiation of our salvation, of our calling, of our regeneration, of our new birth, of our salvation is in God and not in us. Consequently, our new birth, our regeneration, our calling is a gift of God....Now, when I read this in the Bible, and I look in my heart, is it confirmed in my experience? It is. And not only in mine, but in every man who has ever come to know Jesus as his savior. A man or a woman. Everyone of us....Those old, great hymns of long ago were just like that. Isaac Watts wrote the song you sang just a moment ago.

Why was I made to hear thy voice
and enter while there's room
when thousands make a wretched choice
and rather starve than come?

Twice the same love that spread the feast

that sweetly forced me in
else I'd still refuse to taste
And perish in my sin....

In like manner, long years ago, Josiah Conger wrote this hymn,

Tis not that I did choose thee,
For Lord that could not be.
This heart would still refuse thee,
But thou has chosen me.[\[51\]](#)

Conclusion

It is a pity that such preaching is more scarce than it once was. While few deny the reality of human free agency (else what sense could we make of the conscious rejection or acceptance of the gospel?), it seems that, today, the "freedom" of the lost has been magnified at the expense of their "bondage." Unlike the founders of the Southern Baptist Convention, some have come to view lost people as discriminating shoppers, whose failure to buy is due to our failure at marketing.

It is good to note that man's will is free in the sense that his choices flow freely from his character or nature, whether regenerate or unregenerate. But today the spiritual freedom of fallen man is being woefully overrated and, consequently, saving grace is being tragically underrated.

Let us not underestimate our own freedom to address this imbalance, to the magnification of God's grace and the praise of His glory.



¹In 1845, there were about 4,000 Southern Baptist churches. Fifty years later that number had grown to 18,000. In 1945 there were 26,000 and by 1995 the total was approximately 40,000. Assuming one preacher per church, and each preacher preaching for 50 years, the convention has had at least 88,000 preachers. Assuming further that a whole new shift has just reported to work at our 40,000 churches, we shall count only the 48,000 who have gone before. If each of those preached an average of once per Sunday for their 50 years of ministry, we have 2,500 sermons per preacher (M.E. Dodd is reported to have preached 18,000 times! See T.W. Gayer, "Monroe Elmon Dodd," *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, mg. ed., Norman Cox [Nashville: Broadman, 1958], p. 378). This makes a total of 120 million sermons from 48,000 preachers for our first 150 years. Of course, these are extremely conservative numbers. There are more preachers than churches and more sermons than Sunday morning sermons. And the turnover of preachers is much greater.

²C.D. Mallery, "The Doctrine of Election," *The Georgia Pulpit*, Robert Fleming, ed., (Richmond: H.K. Allyson, 1847), p.

176.

³ Ibid., p. 178.

⁴ Ibid., p. 180.

⁵ Ibid., p. 181.

⁶ Addison Hall, "Doctrine of Human Depravity," *The Baptist Pulpit of the United States*, ed., Edward H. Fletcher (New York: Edward H. Fletcher, 1853), p. 133-36.

⁷ James Hall Tenner Kilpatrick, "God's Willingness to Save Sinners," *The Georgia Pulpit*, ed., Robert Fleming (Richmond: H.K. Allyson, 1847), pp. 123-24.

⁸ W.B. Johnson, "Free Agency of Man," *The Baptist Pulpit of the United States*, ed., Joseph Belcher (New York: Edward H. Fletcher, 1853), pp. 125-127.

⁹ Ibid., p. 130.

¹⁰ W.T. Ussery, "Grace," *Sermons* (Union University, 1860), pp. 159,164.

¹¹ Ibid., "The Covenant of Redemption," p. 90.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Thomas E. Skinner, "Conversion," *Sermons, Addresses and Reminiscences* (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1894), p. 91.

¹⁴ W.P. Walker, "'Abandoned of the Lord,'" *The Southern Baptist Pulpit*, ed., J.F. Love (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1895), p. 311.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 310.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 306.

¹⁷ C.B. Williams, "The Worth of Man," *Citizens of Two Worlds* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1919), p. 42.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁹ Ibid., p 137.

²⁰ L.R. Scarborough, "The Savior Knocking at the Door," *The Tears of Jesus* (Nashville: Baptist Sunday School Board, 1922), p. 75.

²¹ Edgar Young Mullins, "The Right to Believe," *Faith in the Modern World* (Nashville: Baptist Sunday School Board, 1930), pp. 11-12, 21.

- ²² M.E. Dodd, "John 3:16,) *Three:Sixteens* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1936), p.31.
- ²³R.C. Campbell, "God's Estimate of Man," *Youth & Yokes* (Nashville: Broadman, 1938), p. 57.
- ²⁴ W.T. Conner, "Jesus, The Friend of Sinners," *The Christ We Need* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1938), p. 45.
- ²⁵ M.F. Ewton, "Limits Beyond Which God Cannot Go," *Cardinal Truths* (Self-published, 1947), p. 48.
- ²⁶ Llew C. Northern, "Man's Quest for God," *Simple Salvation* (Nashville: Broadman, p. 1940), p. 99.
- ²⁷ Ibid., pp. 89-90.
- ²⁸W.P. Hall, "The Optimism of Jesus," *Walking With God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1940), p. 89.
- ²⁹ Ibid., p. 91.
- ³⁰ Adiel Moncrief, "Christ & Human Liberty," *The Loving Christ in the Life of Today* (Nashville: Broadman, 1941), p. 21.
- ³¹Zeno Wall, "Experimental Religion," *Verities of the Gospel* (Nashville: Broadman, 1946), p. 5.
- ³² Roy O. McClain, "The Great Supper, God's Broken Heart," *Stoop and Drink* (Ft. Worth: Radio and Television Commission, 1955), p. 17.
- ³³Ibid., p. 21.
- ³⁴ Herschel Hobbs, "God's Election Day," sermon preached on The Baptist Hour, 8 October, 1967, Beam International, 18, No. 5 (May 1967), pp. 23-24.
- ³⁵ Carlyle Marney, "The New Birth," *Southern Baptist Preaching*, ed., H.C. Brown, Jr. (Nashville: Broadman, 1959), pp. 133-134.
- ³⁶ Clay Warf, "The God of the Lost," *Award Winning Sermons*, ed. James Barry (Nashville: Broadman, 1979), p. 109.
- ³⁷ Frank Stagg, "A Whole Man Made Well," *The Struggle for Meaning* (Valley Forge: Judson, 1977), pp. 73-74.
- ³⁸ J.R. Graves, "The Sovereignty of God," *Satan Dethroned* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1939), pp. 47-48.
- ³⁹ Ibid., p. 49.
- ⁴⁰Ibid., p. 71-72.
- ⁴¹ R.G. Lee, "The Grace of God," *Heart to Heart* (Nashville: Broadman, 1977), p. 141.
- ⁴² Ibid., p. 143.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 54.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 58.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 61.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 65.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 68.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 69.

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⁵⁰ J. Frank Norris, "The New Birth," *The Gospel of Dynamite* (Ft. Worth, 1933), pp. 28-9.

⁵¹ W.A. Criswell, Transcribed from the cassette tape, "The Bible Kind of Salvation: Romans 9:15-16."



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³⁹ Ibid., p. 49.

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Spurgeon on the Implications of Free Will

According to the free will scheme, the Lord intends good, but he must wait like a lackey on his own creature to know what his intention is; God willeth good and would do it but he cannot because he has an unwilling man who will not have God's good thing carried into effect. What do ye, sirs, but drag the Eternal from his throne and lift up into it that fallen creature, man; for man, according to that theory, nods and his nod is destiny. You must have a destiny somewhere; it must either be as God wills or as man wills. If it be as God wills, then Jehovah sits as sovereign upon his throne of glory, and all hosts obey him, and the world is safe; if not God, then you put man there to say, 'I will,' or 'I will not; if I will it, I will enter heaven; if I will it, I will despise the grace of God; if I will it, I will conquer the Holy Spirit, for I am stronger than God and stronger than omnipotence; if I will it, I will make the blood of Christ of no effect, for I am mightier than the blood, mightier than the blood of the Son of God himself; though God make his purpose, yet will I laugh at his purpose; it shall be my purpose that shall make his purpose stand or fall.' Why, sirs, if this be not atheism, it is idolatry; it is putting man where God should be; and I shrink with solemn awe and horror from that doctrine which makes the grandest of God's works--the salvation of man--to be dependent upon the will of his creature whether it shall be accomplished or not. Glory I can and must in my text in its fullest sense. 'It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy' (Romans 9:16).

--Taken from *Evangelical Times*, April 1996 p. 11



God's Will, Man's Will, and Free Will

Ernest Reisinger

(The following article is taken from the opening chapter of a forthcoming book by the author.)

A very important but neglected subject for the modern church is that of free will. It is vital to understand in what sense the will is free and to see how important this issue is to the Christian faith.

Does salvation depend upon man's willingness to be saved apart from a prior work of the Holy Spirit? No one is saved against his will; however, God changes the willer so as to make the sinner willing. The subject of free-will is at the very heart of Christianity and has a profound effect on our message and method of evangelism. While it is true that "whosoever will may come," the Bible teaches that salvation depends not on man's willingness but on God's willingness, God's grace, and God's power. Furthermore, if God did not have power over man's will the whole world would go to hell. God does not exclude anyone in His invitations; however, sinners do exclude themselves.

Philip P. Bliss wrote a hymn called "Whosoever Will."

"Whosoever heareth," shout, shout the sound!
Spread the blessed tidings all the world around;
Tell the joyful news wherever man is found,
"Whosoever will may come."

Whosoever cometh need not delay,
Now the door is open, enter while you may;
Jesus is the true, the only Living Way:
"Whosoever will may come."

"Whosoever will" the promise is secure;
"Whosoever will," forever must endure;
"Whosoever will!" `tis life forever more;
"Whosoever will may come."

"Whosoever will, whosoever will!"
Send the proclamation over vale and hill
`Tis a loving Father calls the wanderer home:
"Whosoever will may come."

If you cannot sing this hymn from the heart then you do not understand the biblical teaching on free-will. The song writer was very wise and prudent when he wrote "Whosoever Will" *may* come. He did not say whosoever will *can* come.

One of the first questions that faces us in any serious study of the freedom of the will is whether there is power of the will to obey God and to do that which is spiritually good. This question is intimately connected with the subject of man's spiritual condition before God. We must begin with how man was created and his state as an unregenerated

being. It is also necessary to know what ability man possessed before the fall and what ability man lost because of the fall. The doctrine of free-will brings us to a consideration, not of the ability and excellency of man, but to his weakness, misery, and inability to do spiritual good.

No man is saved against his will. No man is pardoned while he hates the thought of forgiveness. No man shall have joy in the Lord if he says, "I do not wish to rejoice in the Lord." Do not for a moment think that the angels will push anyone into the gates of heaven. We are not saved against our will; nor is the will taken away, but the work of the Spirit of God is to change the human will, and so make men willing in the day of God's power (Psa. 110:3), working in them to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil 2:13). "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). The Spirit quickens the soul and makes such revelations of truth to it enabling the soul to see things in a different light from what it ever did before, and then the will cheerfully bows that neck that was once as stiff as iron, and wears the yoke it once despised, and wears it gladly. Man is not acted upon as a machine; he is not polished as a piece of marble; he is not planed as a piece of wood, but his mind is acted upon by the Spirit of Life. Man is made a new creature in Christ Jesus, by the will of God, and his own will is blessedly and sweetly made to yield. If you are willing, depend upon it that God made you willing. If you have one spark of love for Him it is a spark from the fire of His love for you. "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). We bring out the crown and say, "On whose head shall we put it?" Every child of God will say, "Crown Him, He is worthy, He has made us to differ." "For who makes you to differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you glory as if you had not received it" (1 Cor 4:7).

The subject of man's will is not a new topic of debate in the Christian church nor among theologians and philosophers. For hundreds of years there have been strong serious debates and discussions on the subject of the freedom of man's will. As far back as the fifth century one of our heroes, Augustine, debated Pelagius on this subject. It was also one of the key issues of the Reformation.

Martin Luther began the Reformation with a denial of free-will. This was, and is, fundamental to the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone.

At the outset of the Reformation, Erasmus, a brilliant scholar, wrote a Diatribe called *Discussion on the Freedom of the Will* defending the Roman Catholic doctrine. In response to Erasmus' diatribe, Luther wrote *The Bondage of the Will*. (Every minister should study this classic.)

When most Christians think of the Reformation, the first thing that comes to their mind is justification by faith alone. There is good reason for that assumption; justification by faith alone was the key doctrine that came out of the Reformation; however, it was not the key issue at the foundation of the Reformation. A careful study of the historical facts will clearly show that the issue of man's will was at the heart of the theological difference between Martin Luther and the Roman Catholic Church.

To emphasize the importance of this subject it may be appropriate and profitable to quote Dr. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston from their historical and theological introduction to Luther's masterpiece. Dr. Packer and O.R. Johnston translated *The Bondage of the Will* from German and Latin to English.

The Bondage of the Will is the greatest piece of theological writing that ever came from Luther's pen. This was his own opinion. Writing to Capito on July 9th, 1537, with reference to a suggested complete edition of his works, he roundly affirmed that none of them deserved preservation save the little children's Catechism and *The Bondage of the Will*; for only they, in their different departments,

were 'right' (*justum*). Others have agreed with Luther in giving this treatise pride of place among his theological productions. B. B. Warfield, for instance, endorsing the description of it as a 'dialectic and polemic masterpiece,' styles it 'the embodiment of Luther's reformation conceptions, the nearest thing to a systematic statement of them that he ever made...it is...in a true sense the manifesto of the Reformation.' And Professor Rupp quotes with approval the description of the book as 'the finest and most powerful *Soli Deo Gloria* to be sung in the whole period of the Reformation.' In its fertility of thought, its vigour of language, its profound theological grasp, its sustained strength of argument and the grand sweep of its exposition, it stands unsurpassed among Luther's writings. It is the worthiest representative of his mature thought that he has left us, and is a far finer memorial of his theological prowess than are the smaller tracts of the preceding years, which are so much better known.

Its character stands out in relief when we compare it with the booklet to which it is a reply. Erasmus' *Diatribes* is elegant and gracefully written, but for all that it is by no means a significant production. There is ample evidence, as we have seen, that Erasmus had no desire to write it and no particular interest in its subject. His book suggests as much. It exhibits much learning but little insight. It makes plain what its author would not have been concerned to deny--that Erasmus of Rotterdam, the learned biblical scholar, was no theologian. It is brief and superficial. Erasmus is deliberately noncommittal on the question which he discusses. He writes on the 'free-will' debate, so he tells us, as a commentator and critic rather than as a contributor to it. His chief point is that it is not a very significant issue, one way or the other; and his main complaint against Luther is simply that the latter shows a defective sense of proportion in laying so much stress on an opinion which is extreme and improbable in itself and relates to a subject which is both obscure and unimportant. *The Bondage of the Will*, on the other hand, is a major treatment of what Luther saw as the very heart of the gospel. It was no mere pot-boiler, written to order; Luther welcomed the opportunity which the appearance of the *Diatribes* afforded for a full written discussion of those parts of his teaching which to his mind really mattered, and plunged into his subject with zest. 'You alone,' he tells Erasmus, 'have attacked the real thing, that is, the essential issue. You have not worried me with those extraneous issues about the Papacy, purgatory, indulgences and such like--trifles, rather than issues--in respect of which almost all to date have sought my blood...you, and you alone, have seen the hinge on which all turns, and aimed for the vital spot. For that I heartily thank you; for it is more gratifying to me to deal with this issue...' 'Free-will' was no academic question to Luther; the whole gospel of the grace of God, he held, was bound up with it, and stood or fell according to the way one decided it. In *The Bondage of the Will*, therefore, Luther believes himself to be fighting for the truth of God, the only hope of man; and his earnestness and energy in prosecuting the argument bear witness to the strength of his conviction that the faith once delivered to the saints, and in consequence the salvation of precious souls, is here at stake. 'As to my having argued somewhat vigorously,' he writes, 'I acknowledge my fault, if it is a fault--but no; I have wondrous joy that this witness is borne in the world of my conduct in the cause of God. May God Himself confirm this witness in the last day!' It is not a part of a true theologian, Luther holds, to be unconcerned, or to pretend to be unconcerned, when the gospel is in danger. This is the explanation of what Warfield calls 'the amazing vigour' of Luther's language. The gospel of God is in jeopardy; the springs of Luther's religion are touched; the man is moved; the volcano erupts; argument pours out of him white-hot. Nowhere does Luther come closer, either in spirit or in substance, to the Paul of Romans and Galatians than in *The Bondage of the Will*.

Why did Erasmus and Luther approach the discussion of 'free-will' in such contrasting attitudes of mind? The answer is not far to seek. Their divergent attitudes sprang from two divergent conceptions of Christianity. Erasmus held that matters of doctrine were all comparatively

unimportant, and that the issue as to whether a man's will was or was not free was more unimportant than most. Luther, on the other hand, held that doctrines were essential to, and constitutive of, the Christian religion, and that the doctrine of the bondage of the will in particular was the corner-stone of the gospel and the very foundation of faith....

This issue came very much alive in the eighteenth century during the Great Awakening. The subject of free-will was also at the bottom of Charles Finney's theological error and unbiblical evangelistic methods. The battle still exists between Reformed and Fundamentalist believers and their respective methods and message of evangelism.

Every serious student of Scripture should understand how vitally important our subject in relation to other important doctrines of the Christian faith, such as, Total Depravity, Election, and Effectual Calling. A right view of free will profoundly effects your methods of evangelism.



A Pharisee's Primer on Free Will

For many people today it is astonishing that Jesus puts such a value on the sovereign rights of God's electing freedom that he would speak the way he does to those who refuse him. He speaks in such a way as to prevent them from boasting that they can overrule the ultimate purposes of God. For example, in John 10:25-26 Jesus responded to the skeptics who demanded more and more proof: "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name they bear witness to me; but *you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep.*" Think about this for a moment. Think about what it means, and think about the fact that Jesus would dare to say it to unbelievers....

Picture yourself as a Pharisee hearing the message of Jesus and saying to yourself, "If he thinks I am going to be sucked into this movement along with the tax collectors and sinners, he's crazy. I have a will of my own and the power to determine my own destiny." And then picture Jesus, knowing what is in your heart, and saying, "You boast in your heart that you are in control of your life. You think that you can frustrate the ultimate plans of my ministry. You think that the great purposes of God in salvation are dependent on your wavering will. Truly, truly I say unto you, the ultimate reason you do not believe is because the Father has not chosen you to be among my sheep." In other words, Jesus is saying, "The final boast of unbelief is destroyed by the doctrine of election." Those whom God chose, he also gave to the Son; and those whom he gave to the Son, the Son also called; and for those whom he called, he laid down his life; and to them he gave eternal joy in the presence of his glory. This is the Father's pleasure.

--John Piper, *The Pleasures of God* (Portland: Multnomah, 1991), p. 137-139.



News

1996 YOUTH Conference

Over 320 registrants gathered at the tenth annual Southern Baptist Founders YOUTH Conference which convened in Panama City Beach in June. Pastors Bill and Tom Ascol addressed the theme of "The Holy War." The reality, intensity and decisiveness of this spiritual conflict were in view as young people were challenged to recognize that there is no neutral ground. Reports of some who were hopefully converted during the week have been received. For 10 years this youth camp has been used of God to change the lives of many young people. It is worthy of the utmost support from those who desire to see youth challenged to be true disciples of Jesus Christ through the exposition and application of God's Word. For information on next year's meeting, contact:

Cindy Kemp, conference secretary
457 Mohican Lane
Shreveport, LA 71106-8311
phone 813/798-7080.

New Professors at Southern Seminary

Two new professors have been added to the faculty of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville. Dr. George Martin is a former Southern Baptist missionary to Indonesia. For the last two years he has been a professor of religion at North Greenville College in Tigerville, SC. He will be teaching missions in the Billy Graham School of Evangelism. Mr. Ben Mitchell is the new Visiting Professor of Ethics. Formerly he served as the Biomedical ethics specialist with the Christian Life Commission and now serves as a consultant for that organization while completing his Ph.D. degree. These additions greatly strengthen the faculty as the seminary continues its progress in returning to its charter and confessional heritage as expressed in the *Abstract of Principles*.



Book Review

The Life and Works of Joseph Kinghorn compiled and edited by Terry Wolever, Particular Baptist Press, 1995, Volume 1, 530 pp. \$24.50
Available from Particular Baptist Press, 2766 W. Weaver Road, Springfield, MO 65810.

Reviewed by [Michael A. G. Haykin](#)

That Joseph Kinghorn (1766-1832) was a leading evangelical luminary of his day was an assured fact with many of his contemporaries. That the vast majority of English-speaking evangelicals at the end of the twentieth century have not so much as heard his name is also an assured fact. Whatever the cause for the latter, be it the vagaries of historical memory or the general ignorance of modern-day evangelicals about their rich heritage, it is to be hoped that the appearance of this first volume of a projected four-volume edition of the works of Kinghorn will help to rectify this situation. This book is also the first to be published by the Particular Baptist Press, which has for its mandate the recovery of the best literature produced by one of the strongest streams in the Reformed tradition, namely, the Particular or Calvinistic Baptists. If this publishing house can continue to produce books of quality like this one, the venture has a bright future.

This first volume of Kinghorn's works contains three pieces: a substantial memoir of Kinghorn running to nearly 500 pages, written by Martin Hood Wilkin, the son of one of Kinghorn's closest friends, and a couple of funeral sermons by John Alexander and John Bane. A brief introduction by Terry Wolever, the editor of these Kinghorn volumes provides a succinct overview of Kinghorn's life.

Never one to seek the limelight, Kinghorn was renowned for his scholarship, especially in the Greek and Roman classics, as well as in rabbinic and patristic studies. He had, Wilkin tells us, "an irrepressible thirst for the acquirement of knowledge" (p. vi). Kinghorn, though, never paraded for his learning in his preaching. Nor was he oblivious to the spiritual dangers posed by academic study. For instance, commenting on the academic method of study favoured by Philip Doddridge (1702-1751), in which the teacher presented the various perspectives on any given theological subject to his students, referred them to the relevant literature, and allowed them to make up their own minds as to which was correct, Kinghorn rightly noted:

It is sufficiently plain that very many of Dr. Doddridge's students imbibed opinions very contrary to his own; and surely this was in part owing to an error in their education. . . . Much as I esteem literature, and much as I have seen of the effects of ignorance in our ministers, I cannot at all think that any influence of education can be set against the evil of a speculating temper, that should fill our churches with cold, careless ministers-mere moralizers in their sermons, or Unitarians in their doctrines. (p. 336).

Surely this is the most baneful effect of many modern evangelical seminaries, that the opinions of liberal theologians are studied with equal assiduity and "impartiality" alongside those of evangelical scholars. The solution, though, is not to dispense with scholarship. Rather, orthodoxy must be taught and strongly recommended, and piety cultivated. As Kinghorn recognized, both spirituality and orthodox scholarship are vital: "literature and piety are both of so much consequence, that we cannot do that with one which we can do with both" (p. 273).

His claim to literary fame rests on the pieces that he wrote against Robert Hall (1764-1831) in favour of closed communion. Kinghorn believed that Hall's open communion position would wash away many of the old Particular

Baptist landmarks, of which a central one was the gathered church. The Particular Baptists gained much by the winds of renewal that swept through their ranks in the closing decades of the eighteenth century, in particular, a passion for evangelism and missions. Yet, this gain was not without a price. In many of their circles, the rich fellowship of the local church suffered, as the local church came to be seen primarily as a vehicle for saving the lost. Kinghorn sought to stand against this trend, but with limited success.

In this connection it is interesting to note that Kinghorn, never one to be hindered in his pulpit pleadings with the unsaved to embrace Christ, found it difficult to speak on an individual basis to strangers about the gospel. In the words of his biographer:

It is remarkable that one of such excellent conversational powers and of such sincere piety, should have found it difficult to introduce, especially to young persons, the subject of religion. When once a question was put and the matter fairly started, he would pursue it with his usual attention and interest, but with him the difficulty was to break the ice. (p. 446).

Wilkins' use of the term "remarkable" here may actually say more about him than about Kinghorn. To one, like Wilkins, living his Christian life in an environment where evangelism, both corporate and individual, was the most important thing in Christian discipleship, Kinghorn's reticence might very well seem "remarkable." From a more balanced perspective it is no more remarkable than the fact that different believers have different gifts.

One final point that struck me as I read this work was a remark made by Wilkins's father and Kinghorn's close friend, Simon Wilkins. In the preface he mentions that "many hundred letters" of Kinghorn "were destroyed as useless" in the preparation of the biography! This was not an uncommon procedure by nineteenth-century biographers. To us, though, it is shocking, for it seriously hampers the efforts of later would-be biographers. Nonetheless, this is a superb biography, still very rich with personal correspondence, both letters to and from Kinghorn. The two funeral sermons that come at the end of the book help to reinforce the picture of Kinghorn that one gleans from the biography, a picture of a faithful servant of the Word.



Christ the Sinner's Hiding Place

Psalm 32:7
L.M. Brewer

HAIL, sovereign love, that first began
The scheme to rescue fallen man!
Hail, matchless, free, eternal grace,
That gave my soul a hiding place!

Against the God who rules the sky
I fought with hand uplifted high;
Despised the mention of His grace,
Too proud to seek a hiding place.

But thus the eternal counsel ran:
"Almighty love, arrest that man!"
I felt the arrow of distress,
And found I had no hiding place.

Indignant Justice stood in view;
To Sinai's fiery mount I flew;
But Justice cried, with frowning face,
"This mountain is no hiding place!"

Ere long a heavenly voice I heard,
And Mercy's angel-form appeared;
She led me on, with placid pace,
To Jesus, as my Hiding Place.

Should storms of seven-fold thunder roll,
And shake the globe from pole to pole,
No flaming bolt could daunt my face,
For Jesus is my Hiding Place.

On Him almighty vengeance fell,
That must have sunk a world to hell;
He bore it for a chosen race,
And thus became their Hiding Place.

A few more rolling suns, at most,
Will land me safe on fair Canaan's coast,
Where I shall sing the song of grace,
And see my glorious Hiding Place.



The Founders
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The Founders
Journal
Main Page

Letters

Dear Sir,

I am an American Baptist pastor in California. I heard about the Founders Journal and I would very much like to subscribe. The church is sick and weakly because the gospel is rarely preached. Emphasis is placed on human effort rather than on the complete depravity of all humankind and the inherent necessity for a grace that is irresistible. I am a sinner, hostile to God and I need a powerful God to save me; Calvinism is the gospel that proclaims such a God and gives Him 100% credit and glory. I have enclosed a check for \$25. I don't know what it costs to subscribe. If \$25 is over the subscription cost consider the balance as a gift for the ministry of the *Founders Journal*.

M. M.
Pacifica, CA

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. I am an associate pastor at a church [in] Texas, and a student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. I am writing to thank you for your excellent ministry through the *Founders Journal*. Your publication is truly a beacon of encouragement to those serving and studying in an environment hostile to Calvinist theology. The sovereignty of God forms the basis of all of my ministry and study. Thanks for helping me with both through the *Founders Journal*.

Seeking to honor him,
D., TX

Thank you for your excellent publication. I look forward to receiving each issue and I have found the articles inspiring and encouraging. You are to be heartily commended for directing Southern Baptists back to the roots of the faith. I particularly enjoyed Piper's article on Spurgeon. I am not a pastor but shared this article with my pastor who enjoyed it as well. Keep up the great work!

Thank You!
R. S.
El Paso, TX
via e-mail

I have been studying the doctrines of grace for about six months. This began as the result of attending classes in a near-by seminary. While growing up in a Southern Baptist church, I never even heard of these issues. I discovered your journal about a month ago and am excited to see that there are Southern Baptists who affirm these doctrines. I was even shocked to discover that the founders of the Southern Baptist Convention were strong Calvinists who held to these doctrines as well. It appears that we have come a long way from there.

While teaching an adult Sunday School class at the Southern Baptist church in which I attend, I brought the idea up that God has chosen us and not vice-versa. That opened a can of worms and I soon thought that I would be labeled a heretic. I have never seen an issue such as this cause such a commotion. In fact, I have been in classes where those in attendance would be less likely to be critical of an unorthodox view of Christ than they would concerning the doctrine of election. Is this the typical reaction in most SBC churches?...Thanks again for your journal and please keep it coming.

B. S., Georgia
via e-mail

