

# **The Role of Free Will in Salvation, Election and Sovereignty**

**Les Galicinski**

**December 14 1998**

## Table of Contents

THE ROLE OF FREE WILL IN SALVATION, ELECTION AND SOVEREIGNTY.....	2
<i>Introduction:</i> .....	2
<i>Free Will - A Fair Assumption?</i> .....	3
<i>Biblical Freedom and the Fall</i> .....	3
<i>Two Views on Salvation:</i> .....	6
<i>Election and Atonement</i> .....	8
<i>Providence and Sovereignty</i> .....	10
<i>The Effect of Arminian Free Will Theism</i> .....	11
<i>Bibliography</i> .....	14

## ***The Role of Free Will in Salvation, Election and Sovereignty***

### **Introduction:**

The extent to which the human will is free from external causes of influence has perplexed philosophers and theologians for ages. Does our life consist of a series of autonomous choices, or are we predestined in some way to do certain things. Insofar as Christ's church is concerned, does the fellowship of believers come to existence as a result of a series of human free will choices; or are Christ's sheep predestined and chosen by God without regard to human will? The former view is historically called *Arminianism* while the second has been called *Calvinism*.<sup>1</sup> In addition, many have tried to hold some compromise view that would deny neither man's free will nor divine election.

This issue is especially vital to the church as our theological position on this issue governs our language, our worship and our world view. The evangelical community in particular in its evangelistic efforts tends to use language that emphasizes freedom of choice. Is this a secular concept smuggled in from philosophy or is there a biblical justification? Why does the language of *Calvinism* seem out of place in modern Evangelistic circles?

In pursuing these issues, three theses will be put forth. These are:

1. God created man (Adam and Eve) with freedom of the will regarding moral choice. However, since the fall of man, the human will has been captive to sin and is not free with respect to things of God, but is in fact corrupted in nature and not morally neutral. Unless God acts to save men, all are dead in sin and lost.
2. God saves men, by reaching out and changing their hearts and minds (regeneration), invoking surrender, giving them saving faith in Christ and eternal life. Those saved are chosen by God and are "the elect" of scripture. Man is unable come to God of his own free will.
3. The Arminian emphasis on human free will decision in salvation is a result of syncretistic theology, compromises God's sovereignty and makes salvation contingent on man's choice, leading to flawed theology, spiritual elitism and compromised worship of God.

---

<sup>1</sup> McGregor, R.K. *No Place for Sovereignty* page 18

These points are all consistent with the five points of Calvinism<sup>2</sup>, yet arguing for all five points is beyond the scope of this work.

### **Free Will - A Fair Assumption?**

In examining this controversy, it is important to seek clarification of terms. McGregor defines *free will* as “the belief that the human will has an inherent power to choose with equal ease between alternatives”<sup>3</sup>. That is, that the will is free from any necessary causation, that it is autonomous or free from external control. McGregor points out that the Arminian view assumes that free will is an innate human characteristic. No attempt is ever made to prove it as it is assumed to be self evident. Samuel Fisk, in attempting to reconcile the views, admits God’s foreknowledge but insists that scripture “is just as plain in it’s declaration of man’s free will”<sup>4</sup> but he does not attempt to prove it from scripture. He insists that “‘Whosoever will’ means just what it says”. Yet this is not scripture, but a verse from a Hymn. Evans in commenting on Kierkegaard concedes that “any view of salvation that gives a role to human free choice must face the objection that human freedom is an unbiblical concept.”<sup>5</sup> Yet the Arminian says that God never overrides our free will. If so, how could God ever ordain anything or inspire prophecy of anything if man’s will is completely autonomous? How could the God of the Old Testament who acts in history ever be sure of anything, promise anything or accomplish anything if he never acted through the will and actions of anyone? The Arminian answer is that God fore-knows what we will choose and so ordains it. But this destroys His sovereignty. In addition to the biblical problem, we have an epistemological one. How can we ever know free will to be true? We cannot observe ourselves in a detached way, because we are not in an independent position as an objective observer. We are part of the experiment and have no independent reference point. We seem to ourselves to act freely, but do we really? McGregor points out that if the will is totally uncaused, then it is purely random. So how can we be held accountable for random events? He suggests that we do not act at random but in concert with our character and nature. The will is free in the sense that it freely expresses our nature. But to what extent is it free of divine sovereignty?

### **Biblical Freedom and the Fall**

The word *free* first occurs in the Bible in God’s commandment to Adam::

---

<sup>2</sup> Boettner, Lorraine, *The Reformed Faith* pages 25-29

<sup>3</sup> McGregor, R.K. *No Place for Sovereignty* page 44

<sup>4</sup> Fisk, Samuel, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom* page 9

“You are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it, you will surely die” (Gen. 2: 16-17 NIV)

Adam is said to be free in that he is not constrained, but given moral choice. He is also free in the sense that eating of any other tree maintains him within the will and fellowship of God. Especially noteworthy is access to the “tree of life” which is part of the freedom at this point. This freedom is sharply contrasted to the consequences of the fall as he is banished from the garden and from the tree of life.

Augustine in his four “states” of human development describes Adam before the fall as

1. *Able not to sin* and *able to sin*,
2. After the fall as *unable not to sin*
3. Renewed in Christ, believers are again like Adam *able not to sin* and *able to sin* .
4. In glory, believers will be *unable to sin*.<sup>6</sup>

Biblical freedom is pictured as freedom from slavery, from bondage, from living in a state of captivity (as in slavery in Egypt, a slave who is ransomed, etc.) and freedom from the slavery of sin.

Calvin also sees biblical freedom not only as freedom from slavery to sin, but freedom for doing the will of God. The regenerated believer is able like Adam to freely eat of all that God has made available to him. It is a positive freedom of doing the will of God.<sup>7</sup> McGregor puts it well “[biblical] *freedom* means ethical submission to God and the resulting blessings of personal fulfillment. It does not mean the autonomy of the will, an idea never encountered in the Bible.”<sup>8</sup> . He continues to point out that human autonomy is actually the serpent’s proposition to Eve “You will not surely die”. This implies a future that is a realm of pure possibility to be determined by man as he aspires to be like God. Satan promises a freedom that is self-determination, not submission to God. Allowed unchecked, God would not control reality as no one could know what a truly free will might decide. While striving for such autonomy, Adam in fact loses his real freedom and becomes, as all who come after him, captive to sin. In this way MacGregor links our acceptance of human autonomy (free will) as part of the great lie of Satan.

The concept of the bondage of the will to sin and subsequent freedom in Christ is fundamental to Christian theology. This doctrine was entrenched by Augustine as his views prevailed over Pelagianism which

---

<sup>5</sup> Evans, Stephen C. *Salvation, Sin and Human Freedom in Kierkegaard* The Grace of God, The Will of Man page 184

<sup>6</sup> McGregor, R.K. *No Place for Sovereignty* page 23

<sup>7</sup> Calvin, John *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* page 27

maintained that man's will was largely unaffected by the fall. Calvin and Luther subsequently affirmed this doctrine and few serious Christian theologians question it today. Jesus words still ring true "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin" (John 3:34 NIV). Since the fall men are enslaved to sin in two senses. First, they are under the moral condemnation of either the law, or their own conscience and second they are slaves to sin itself that renders them incapable of spiritual obedience.

The unregenerate man, then, is in no biblical sense, free. His will is fully enslaved to and in the custody of sin. Luther writes in *The Bondage of the Will* :

"Scripture sets before us a man who is not only bound, wretched, captive, sick and dead, but who through the operation of Satan his Lord, adds to his other miseries that of blindness, so that he believes himself to be free, happy, possessed of liberty and ability, whole and alive"<sup>9</sup>

In addition this man has no spiritual discernment whatsoever. As Paul writes :

"The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, for they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor 2:14)

How can such a man be saved? He cannot, unless God acts first to change him. This is the Calvinist doctrine of Election and Regeneration whereby God chooses men for salvation. An entire avalanche of scripture supports this. McGregor summarizes five steps to prove depravity, listed with scripture references:<sup>10</sup>

1. Since the Fall of Adam and Eve, all are born spiritually dead in nature, and therefore require regeneration to a life they do not now possess. See Genesis 6:5-7; Psalm 51:5, 58:3; Jeremiah 17:9-10; John 3:5-7; Romans 5:12; 8:7-8; Ephesians 2:1-3, 8-10; Colossians 2:13.
2. Being fallen, the natural heart and mind is sinfully corrupt and unenlightened. See Genesis 6:5; 8:21; Ecclesiastes 9:3; Jeremiah 17:9-10; Mark 7:21-23; John 3:19; Romans 8:7-8; I Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 4:17-19; 5:8; Titus 1:1.
3. Because the whole of nature is involved in the Fall and its results, sinners are slaves to sin. See John 8:34, 44; Romans 6:20; Ephesians 2:1-2; 2:25-26; Titus 3:3; 1 John 3:10; 5:19.
4. No one escapes the unrighteous tendencies of the sinful Adamic state. See 1 Kings 8:46; 2 Chronicles 6:36; Job 15:1-16; Psalm 130:3; 143:2 Proverbs 20:9; Ecclesiastes 7:20, 29; Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:9-18; James 3:2, 8:1; 1 John 1:8-10.

---

<sup>8</sup> McGregor, R.K. *No Place for Sovereignty* page 83

<sup>9</sup> Luther, Martin *The Bondage of the Will* page 162

<sup>10</sup> McGregor, R.K. *No Place for Sovereignty* pp 112-115

5. Left to themselves, those dead in trespasses and sins have no spiritual ability to reform themselves, or to repent, or to believe savingly. See Job 14:4; Jeremiah 13:23; Matthew 7:16-18; 12:33; John 6:44, 65; Romans 11:35-36; I Corinthians 2:14; 4:7; 2 Corinthians 3:5.

The only way around it for the Arminian is to claim that this is not the sinner's true state. That he is, despite this condition, able somehow to respond to the Gospel as an autonomous act of his free will. The Arminian objects to the idea of "total depravity" insisting that it describes humans as no better than animals. He points out that even the depraved do good as well as evil and that this is proof of his free moral choice. Extending this idea leads to the supposition that man is still an autonomous moral agent and that he can choose to believe the Gospel if aided by grace. However, despite good actions, which the Calvinist would say are for his own benefit and due to common grace, the sinner still lives as a captive of sin. He not only sins but he lives "in sin". He is still blind to things of God and cannot come to God as an act of his own will. The difference in views provides for two models on how exactly salvation occurs.

### Two Views on Salvation:

In order for man to be saved, he must be able to see or perceive his need. The Arminian view is he is still a morally neutral agent and is able to see the benefits of Christ and so, in exercising faith, he comes to believe, and thus is regenerated, saved and translated to eternal life. This view attests that faith comes first, and then regeneration. The one saved may not of necessity be in a position of despondency, but only needs to be convinced of the merits of Christ. The work of the Holy Spirit is to woo and draw the man. But the man has the full ability to respond or to harden his heart and resist. This view paints a picture of the unregenerate which is not faithful to scripture nor to the doctrine of depravity. The doctrine of depravity is crucial as its truth drives man to despair of himself as he realizes that his true state is one of wretchedness, sinfulness, inability to do what is right, slavery and bondage to sin. Luther points out:

"God has surely promised His grace to the humbled: that is, to those who mourn over and despair of themselves. But a man cannot be thoroughly humbled till he realizes that his salvation is utterly beyond his own powers, counsels, efforts, will and works, and depends absolutely on the will, counsel, pleasure and work of Another - God alone. As long as he is persuaded that he can make even the smallest contribution to his salvation, he remains self-confident and does not utterly despair of himself, and so is not humbled before God; but plans out for himself (or at least hopes and longs for) a position, an occasion, a work, which shall bring him final salvation. But he who is out of doubt that his destiny depends entirely on the will of God despairs entirely of himself, chooses nothing for himself, but waits for God to work in him; and such a man is very near to grace for his salvation."<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Luther, Martin *The Bondage of the Will* page 100

The Arminian view that faith, on the part of a morally neutral agent who decides to choose Christ, comes first, is inconsistent with the Biblical view of conversion. McGregor describes a statement made by Michael Buss in responding to the assertion that faith comes before regeneration:

‘Michael said, "I see. What you mean then is that when you heard the gospel, you managed, contrary to all your past habits, to so revolutionize the bent of your fallen character that while dead in trespasses and sins, at enmity with God, with a darkened understanding and thinking the gospel foolishness, you managed to reconstruct your whole spiritual awareness around a new center, so as to realize that the gospel is your best bet, and so you embraced Christ as your Savior, whereupon God rewarded you for this wonderful effort of spiritual achievement by giving you everlasting life. Is that what you meant to say?"

Totally taken aback, I stammered that no, that was not really what I intended to say.

Michael responded simply, "Well, that's what you *did* say. Think about it."<sup>12</sup>

The Calvinist view of salvation is that man is completely unable to come to belief on his own without the specific intervention of God. This intervention is the supernatural act of regeneration *by God* whereby He gives life to whomever He will. When the gospel is heard by one of the elect, the Holy Spirit applies it savingly to the heart, ensuring the begetting of eternal life in the soul. The gospel comes not only “in word” but in the power of the “Holy Spirit” Paul writes: “For we know brothers loved by God, that He has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but in the power of the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction” (1 Thess1:4-6 NIV). McGregor points out that this regeneration is an act of God and is instantaneous, taking place deep in the heart and is non experiential. He compares it to the inception of new life in the womb at conception. What the woman experiences is the development of new life within - the process of pregnancy. Accordingly “*conversion is our human response to the movements of the new life within*”<sup>13</sup> (emphasis his). Listening to Christian testimonies verifies that, one thing in common happens. There is a change within. Sometimes this happens at the same time as the gospel is preached, sometimes it happens independently, but one thing is made very clear in the Bible: regeneration is not brought about by “the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13 NASB) Through regeneration, the believer does not choose God so much as, on being touched, he surrenders his will to God. This is not an act of man’s will but an act of God that brings about negation of will. I surrender by letting God have his way with me. He will anyway, because he is Sovereign, but God allows me to let go and let Him take control. This is not free will in the sense “whosoever will may come”

---

<sup>12</sup> McGregor, R.K. *No Place for Sovereignty* page 104

<sup>13</sup> McGregor, R.K. *No Place for Sovereignty* page 133



but is responding to God's initiative with surrender of will, synchronizing my will with God's will ("Thy will be done"). This spirit of surrender is that which transforms, frees from slavery and creates a new life of unity with the Godhead through the Holy Spirit. It produces a God centered will. It is caused by God Himself not by man's decision. Regeneration then precedes faith. Calvin writes:

"they act most preposterously who place election after faith, as if the root should be placed after the fruit. Then Paul lays down the unique cause of election, the good pleasure of God which He has in Himself, he excludes all other causes."<sup>14</sup>

### **Election and Atonement**

The fact that believers are chosen by God and given regeneration bothers Arminians because, not only does it negate the relevance of the free will decision, but also does not seem intrinsically "fair". That God would ordain some to life and not others is counter to our "equal rights" culture. This blending (or bending) of theology with culture is what MacGregor terms *Syncretism* and is at the heart of the Arminian view. Pinnock maintains that each generation must interpret the scriptures in light of their own cultural situation and encourages theologians to do so in order to keep it relevant.<sup>15</sup> However, sound doctrine should not be culturally dependent but must be scripturally accurate. In maintaining that God elects believers, the Calvinist is supported by another avalanche of scripture: Mc Gregor lists the following:

"Deuteronomy 7:6-7; Psalm 65:4; Isaiah 46:9-11; 55:11; Daniel 4:35; Matthew 11:27; 20:15; 22:14; 24:24, 31; Mark 13:20; John 15:16; Act 18: 10; 18:27; Romans 9:11-13, 16; 11 :29; Ephesians 1 :4; 2: 10; ~ 13; 2 Thessalonians 2:12-14; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 1:1; I Peter 1. 13:8; 17:8, 14; and many others. These verses are a small selection of nearly 150 texts on election pre-ordination, fore-ordination and similar terms."<sup>16</sup>

He continues:

"When Jesus said to his disciples in John 15:16, "You did not chose me, but I chose you," he hardly meant, "I decided to choose you because I realized you would choose me." The condition that the Arminian would have believer supply is expressly excluded in verses such as John 10:26 "You do not believe, because you are not of My sheep" (NASB). If Jesus were an Arminian, he would have said, "You are not of my sheep because you do not believe. " Throughout John's Gospel, Christ's sheep are the elect chosen out of the world, whom the Father has given him out of be his very own. Peter calls them "a chosen people" (I Pet 2:9) for His name" (Acts 15:14 NASB). Jesus was simply following lament language when he called them "the elect" in the gospels."

---

<sup>14</sup> Calvin, John *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* page 69

<sup>15</sup> Pinnock, Clark, *From Augustine to Arminius: a Pilgrimage in Theology* The Grace of God, The Will of Man page 15

<sup>16</sup> McGregor, R.K. *No Place for Sovereignty* page 122

The passages in Exodus 33:19 and on proclaim that God will “have mercy on whom he will have mercy” in order to express His glory. Acts 13:48 states that “all who were appointed to eternal life believed”. Romans 9 is the famous chapter on election as it portrays how Jacob was elected over Esau while they were still in the womb. In answering the charge that God is unjust, Paul writes:

‘What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom have mercy, and I will have compassion whom I have compassion." It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on Christ's mercy "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all earth." Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.’ (Rom 9:16-18 NIV)

Yet, despite the evidence, the Arminian is still unconvinced and insists on holding God up to a human view of justice that insists that He treat all equally. It doing so, he makes God subject to this view of justice. God then is no longer ultimate but becomes finite, subject to man's view of justice. This is nothing less than idolatry. Calvin writes:

“For the question hinges on this, whether there is no justice of God, except what we can conceive. To formulate this in a word: is it lawful to measure the power of God by our natural sense? There is no one who would not immediately reply that all the senses of men concentrated in one man, must succumb before the immense power of God”<sup>17</sup>

Calvin insists that we are not to ask the question as to why some are chosen and others not as this lies solely within His will and constitutes “His inscrutable judgments and uninvestigable ways”<sup>18</sup>. In addressing the issue of fairness, the Calvinist points out that all men are in fact getting what they deserve and have earned. Since the “wages of sin are death”, God would indeed be fair and just if He let all perish. The fact that He, out of mercy, saves some is a bonus. To hold Him to account for not giving this bonus to all is to fault Him for being generous. (See parable of the workers: Matt 20: 1-16).

The doctrine of “election” leads directly to the issue of “limited atonement”. The reformed view is that Christ died for the elect. Both Old Testament and New Testament scripture portrays a picture of substitutionary atonement. Christ's was a sacrifice necessary to satisfy divine justice. But to whose credit was this atonement made? The Calvinist view is that Christ died for me in my place as one of the elect. The Arminian view is that Christ died for an indeterminate number of men who would believe of

---

<sup>17</sup> Calvin, John *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* page 60

<sup>18</sup> Calvin, John *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* page 64

their own free will. John Owen<sup>19</sup> points out that if we hold that the nature of the atonement is substitutionary, “the conclusion that the extent of the atonement is limited to the elect is unavoidable. Because not all are saved, Christ could not have died as a satisfaction for the sins of all existing unbelievers as this would require God to punish twice for the same sins of those finally lost.” The Arminian view of “blanket atonement” necessitates that God actually secured the redemption of no one, but made it available to everyone on the condition that they believe. John Owen’s defense of particular redemption titled *The Death of Death in the death of Christ*<sup>20</sup> is compelling. In it he asks if unbelief is a sin or not. If not, then why should unbelievers be punished for it? If so, why must that hinder them more than the other sins for which Christ died? If He did not die for this sin, then He did not die for all their sins. The only logical conclusion is that Christ died for all the sins of some men, “the elect”.

The only way around this for the Arminian is to change the nature of the atonement. In *the Nature of the Atonement* (1856)<sup>21</sup>, John McLeod Campbell concluded that to accept the substitutionary nature of the atonement made limited atonement inevitable. The only way out was to abandon penal substitution and to offer a notion of Christ’s “repentance” on behalf of us. The further one goes along this line, the further away from scripture and orthodoxy one gets.

### Providence and Sovereignty

Another issue for the Arminian is Predestination. Because they are committed to free will as a natural attribute of man, a conflict arises with the doctrine of Predestination whereby God ordains events and brings them to pass. If human history is made up of a series of free will decisions, how can God be sure that anything will come to pass. He in effect, must wait to see who will decide what, and be constantly modifying plans to effect any sort of divine will at all. The Arminian answer is that God foreknows what human will decisions will be and then preordains on the basis of that foreknowledge. But that still makes man the causal factor and not God. The scriptures are full of instances where God in effect brings events to pass by His sovereign will. ( Example: Is 37:26 “Have you not heard? Long ago I ordained it. In days of old I planned it: now I have brought it to pass”) . The Spanish Jesuit Louis Molina formulated a doctrine of divine omniscience which he called *middle knowledge*<sup>22</sup>. This was an attempt to

---

<sup>19</sup> McGregor, R.K. *No Place for Sovereignty* page 148

<sup>20</sup> *ibid* page 172

<sup>21</sup> *ibid* page 174

<sup>22</sup> Craig, William, *Middle Knowledge Augustine Calvinist-Arminian Rapprochement?* [The Grace of God, The Will of Man](#) page 141

describe how God formulates plans and brings them about while maintaining human free will. Essentially, God engages in massive contingency planning. Prior to making a decision, God possesses “natural knowledge” which consists of all possible actions events and their off shoots. “Free knowledge” is defined as definitive absolute knowledge of all events after God has decided on a particular course of action. But a third type of knowledge is introduced. *Middle knowledge* is that knowledge that God saw in his own essence what each will would do with its innate freedom were it to be placed in an infinitely many order or things. Because each will is free, God cannot control middle knowledge, but can decide to choose one possible contingency of events and thus ordain it without impinging on free will. This is an interesting way of looking at how God’s sovereignty might work in concert with human decision making, however it does not change the fact that human free will decisions are driven by the nature and character of the person. A bad man makes bad decisions and a godly man good decisions. The unregenerate sinner is still a slave to sin, and locked in depravity unless God acts supernaturally. Why does God need to go through all this contingency planning (which could never save anyone) when all he needs to do is supernaturally intervene and change people. Jesus’ miracles are ample proof that God can operate this way if He so chooses. The regeneration of the sinner is no less a miracle. This still does not prove free will in the Arminian morally neutral freedom-of-choice sense.

What insistence on such free will and the fact that God never overrides it, does do is remove from God the ability to choose whom He will save. We have already looked at all the scriptures that support divine election. So God’s very sovereignty is compromised. The Arminian says that God chooses to limit himself in this way so as not to compromise human free will, so instead He compromises His sovereignty. But this view is simply not supported in scripture.

### **The Effect of Arminian Free Will Theism**

The essential root of Arminianism is the syncretic joining of a Greek philosophical concept, free will, with biblical doctrine. The idea of human freedom and autonomy is so “sacred” in our secular society, that any suggestion that it might not be true seems like foolishness. (And so foolishness to them the Gospel is.) But as Christians, we must get our suppositions and our view of reality from the Bible and not from humanist philosophy. McGregor warns that:

“The Greek presupposition of metaphysical autonomy, under the term *free will*, continues to act much like a computer virus, progressively disintegrating the whole program until it is confronted and destroyed. If Christians do not confront it but continue to wed their gospel to it in each generation, they will continue to find widening gaps in their theological foundations and undermine their apologetic efforts in defense of reduced and compromised theology.”<sup>23</sup>

The effect is then a compromised theology. Christian’s who read the many passages on “the elect” will find themselves wondering about this strange language and inventing ways of making it fit with free will theism. Because reconciliation is impossible, an appeal to mystery has to be made. An example is a popular saying describing salvation as a door that on the outside says “*Whosoever will may come*”, but once inside reads on the back “*Predestined from the foundation of the world*”<sup>24</sup>. The fact that these two statements are contradictory is explained as a mystery to be revealed in glory. No doubt there are mysteries which will be revealed in glory, but the scripturally clear doctrine of election is not one of them.

A larger issue is to what extent apologetic strategy should be linked to culture. It may help us communicate better to the secular world by buying into their philosophical assumptions, but this ultimately compromises the message and the God it presents. Paul warns against this in Colossians 2:8 “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceitful philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ”. Francis Shaeffer’s ministry encourages evangelicals instead to challenge the intellectual assumptions of a lost world. As McGregor writes: “It is now widely recognized that the gospel must be presented to the world of fallen thought, as a total challenge, as a comprehensive vision of reality, not just as an alternative privatized religion within a religiously multicultural scene”<sup>25</sup>

Another effect of free will theism is that it suggests that evangelism is about converting people on the basis of free will decisions. If we could only convince them to choose Christ, then they will be saved. An Arminian prays for the lost by asking that they come to their senses and choose Christ, an appeal to free will choosing the good. A Calvinist prays, that God will have mercy and touch His people to bring them fully into His kingdom. The Calvinist emphasis is on God’s work in conversion through the Holy Spirit. His job as an evangelist is to paint a picture of the true state of man, the finished work of Christ and an appeal to the elect to repent and come home. The Holy Spirit does the conversion. The Arminian the

<sup>23</sup> McGregor, R.K. *No Place for Sovereignty* page 206

<sup>24</sup> Told to me by a friend, Don Cymbaluk

<sup>25</sup> McGregor, R.K. *No Place for Sovereignty* page 206

other hand, focuses on convincing people of the need to accept Jesus as savior and counts decisions for Christ, never minding how many of these “converts” actually move on in sanctification and live a life worthy of their calling. Evangelism is important, but in it, our theological outlook needs to be valid, so that we present a true picture of God and reality. God must truly get the glory and not man.

Another effect of free will theism is a subtle spiritual superiority. If conversion is the result of my freewill decision, then I thank God that I was smart enough to figure it out and choose Christ. (This is much like the prayer of the Pharisee) . The Arminian will answer that my exercise of faith was non meritorious<sup>26</sup> so I have nothing to boast about. However that may be, it does not change the fact that eternity for me hinged on *my decision*. Arminian churches are then full of people who “made a decision” for Christ. So where was God? Sitting on the sidelines cheering man on? The result then is a very subtle spiritual superiority over those who were unable or unwilling to choose the truth. The Calvinist instead, falls on his knees and thanks God, that God chose him, even while he was lost in sin, blind and deserving death. He continues to ask for mercy as he grows in grace. (Much like the prayer of the publican). To be sure, Calvinist churches also can fall also victim to elitism by thinking of themselves as “the elect”, but this temptation was also common to Israel, and they needed to be constantly reminded of their being chosen “to be a blessing” and to live in humility and righteousness. To be chosen and saved by God is to be chosen for something. Seeking God’s will becomes a priority.

---

<sup>26</sup> Fisk, Samuel, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom* page 26

A further effect is on the life of the church in Worship. Our proclamation of truth in worship depends on the extent to which we understand the rich heritage of theological truth that God has revealed in his Word. Holding a compromised “free will” theology, we cannot worship God in the fullness of the revelation that He has given us. God’s sovereignty is subject to our concept of fairness and our view of the church as a covenant community established by God is compromised. We end up worshipping a finite God, whom we incorrectly know. God becomes our buddy, whom we chose, much like a person chooses his friends.

The Calvinist doctrines of the depravity of man and God’s sovereign election of believers, supernaturally regenerating them and giving them faith through grace, however, lead to a humility of walk based on thankfulness to God for His great mercy. Those chosen by God become aware of their calling to be used of God for His Glory. Evangelism becomes testimony to God’s love, greatness and mercy in a fallen world. Worship becomes centered again on the great truths of the Christian faith and a celebration of His covenant with His people, chosen by Him for His Glory.

It is time that the evangelical church got back to its roots, and the great truths that were established by titans of the faith such as Augustine, Calvin and Luther, based on scripture alone. Failure to do so will be our demise. You cannot compromise God. His great truths will prevail. How sad if not in our churches.

Les Galicinski

## **Bibliography**

McGregor, R.K. *No Place for Sovereignty*, Inter Varsity Press 1996

Calvin, John, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, translated by J.K.S. Reid, James Clarke 1961

Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, translated by J.I Packer & O.R. Johnson, Fleming H. Revell Co. 1957

Pinnock, Clark, ed. *The Grace of God, The Will of Man*, Academie Books (Zondervan) 1989

Boettner, Lorraine, *The Reformed Faith*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co, 1983

Boettner, Lorraine, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co, 1974

Fisk, Samuel. *Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom*, Loizeaux Brothers 1973

Warfield, Benjamin B., *Calvin and Augustine*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co, 1980