

## Neo-Calvinism vs the Bible 020

Acts 17:30

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Let's open our Bibles to John 1:9. We are at a point in this study on "Neo-Calvinism vs. the Bible," where we are basically taking the Calvinistic acronym TULIP and running it through the grid of Scripture—does Scripture really support what Calvinism and Neo-Calvinism are teaching? The ultimate court of arbitration is always the Scripture. It is not what a system says; it is not what a pastor says; it is not what someone who has five billion followers online says; it is not what a best-selling author says. It is what the Scripture says.

### **Neo-Calvinism vs. The Bible**

- I. Calvinism's Mixed Blessing
- II. Why Critique Calvinism?
- III. The Source of Calvin's Theology
- IV. Calvin's Manner of Life
- V. TULIP Through the Grid of Scripture**
- VI. Conclusion

So we did that with the "T" in the Calvinistic system and found it to be wanting. The Calvinistic system begins with "T," Total Depravity, which is a doctrine I believe in, but they define it differently than I would. They just substitute the word "inability." So a person that is unsaved is unable to come to Christ: they are unable to believe even when the Holy Spirit convicts them. God on the front end does a work where He imparts to some the gift of faith. And the only people that receive the gift of faith are the elect. We dealt with that, and then we moved on to the "U," which stands for Unconditional Election.

#### **V. Running TULIP Through the Grid of Scripture**

- A. Total Depravity
- B. Unconditional Election**
- C. Limited Atonement
- D. Irresistible Grace
- E. Perseverance of the Saints

Here are the three big parts that we are looking at. The first two we have already covered.

#### **B. Unconditional Election**

- 1. Divine sovereignty vs. human freewill = a profound mystery
- 2. Calvinism and double predestination
- 3. Calvinism's overstatement of Divine Sovereignty

When we get into this subject of divine sovereignty versus human free will—do we choose God or does God choose us—I'd just like to come out and be honest with you about what I believe on this. I may not have it right, but this is my belief on it: that it is basically both. When I got married, I chose my wife, and my wife chose me. Our relationship to the Lord is analogized to the bride and groom, husband and wife relationship.

That is the way the Chafer Theological Seminary (that I am the president of) doctrinal statement reads. It says,

"We believe Scripture reveals two clear and indisputable lines of evidence. One line shows God sovereignly choosing His own in Christ; the other shows man possessing the function of volition, able to receive or reject God's uniquely born Son (regarding sovereignty, see Job 42:2; Psalm 135:6; Isaiah 46:9–10; Jeremiah 1:5; Matthew 24:22, 24, 31; Luke 18:7; Romans 8:29–33; Galatians 1:15; 2 Timothy 2:10; 1 Peter 1:1–2; regarding human volition, see John 1:9–13; 3:16, 36; 6:47; 20:30–31; Acts 16:30–31; Romans 10:11–13; 1 John 5:9–13, as well as every command in the epistles)."<sup>1</sup>

Divine sovereignty versus human free will is one of those things that I just plead mystery on: I do not understand it. Things like this used to upset me, but they do not anymore. They just show me that the Bible comes from a time dimension outside of our own, which causes me to rejoice that the Bible is from above: the Bible could not have been written by merely humans.

So from there we moved into what Calvinism is teaching about this subject of divine sovereignty. And they believe something very different from what I have tried to articulate. They believe in something called double predestination: there are certain people elected unto salvation. As I understand their teachings, it is a very small fraction of humanity elected. What about the rest? Well, they are elected unto damnation. In other words, they were created for the purpose of having no ability to trust in Christ whatsoever, because they are not one of the elect. God has no obligation to impart the gift of faith to them, and so they go into hell with no opportunity to receive Christ at all. In fact, they were planned and programmed to do that by the Creator.

So this is not just an election unto salvation—it is an election unto damnation for the vast majority of the human race. To show you that they really do teach this, here is a quote from none other than John Calvin himself in his "Institutes of the Christian Religion." He says,

"Now, since the arrangement of all things is in the hand of God, since to him belongs the disposal of life and death, he arranges all things by his sovereign counsel, in such a way that individuals are born, who are doomed from the womb to certain death, and are to glorify him by their destruction."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.chafer.edu/soteriology>

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. 3, Chapter 23, section 6.

So somehow God is glorified in doing this. And if you raise a moral objection against this, the answer comes back, "Well, who are you to question God?" So they are not just teaching election unto salvation: they are also teaching election unto damnation, if you are not providentially blessed to be one of the elect, the ones that God has chosen beforehand.

### 3. Calvinism's overstatement of Divine Sovereignty

- a) Omni-causality
- b) Salvation is available to all**
- c) Election proof texts (John 6:44; 15:16; Rom. 8:29-30)
- d) Double predestination proof texts (Rom. 9)
- e) Loss of evangelism
- f) Loss of love for the lost (Ezek. 18:23, 32; 33:11)
- g) Babies in hell? (2 Sam. 12:19-24)

Since that is their position, what I have here is how the Calvinists are overstating divine sovereignty. I believe in divine sovereignty, but not like they do. We went through "a": what they are really teaching is omni-causality. What they believe is not just that God is sovereign over everything, but that God causes everything. So they will say God caused the Fall in Genesis 3—which makes God the author of evil when you think about it. According to them, even the Luciferian rebellion, Satan's rebellion in heaven with a third of the angels, is not something that God allowed: it is something that God caused.

You can see how damaging this is in the area of counseling. If someone comes to you with something really horrific that has happened in their life—a health issue, a criminal assault, a murder, whatever—the Calvinists' basic teaching is that God caused it. And I do not believe that is what the Scripture teaches.

John Piper, a very aggressive Calvinist today in the Neo-Calvinist movement, here is talking about how God caused—not allowed or used, but actually caused—the Holocaust. He says,

"God's having even brought about the Nazis' brutality at Birkenau and Auschwitz as well as the terrible killings of Dennis Rader and even the sexual abuse of a young child. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

Piper says that God actually is the author of that: He caused that. So that is not saying that God is sovereign over all things: it is saying that God causes all things. You do not have to get far in the Bible to see that this is false. Jesus made a statement about evil in Mark 7:20-23.

*"And He was saying, 'That which proceeds out of the man,'—so there is another source of evil that God has nothing to do with—"that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."*

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<sup>3</sup> John Piper, *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*, 42.

You move into the doctrine of omni-causality—God causes everything—and Mark 7:20-23 says that there are other causations of evil. Man in his fallen state causes a lot of problems. Satan and his fallen state cause a lot of problems. Now, if you want to get into an argument,—“Does God allow it?”—that is a fair argument. If you want to, you can get into an argument with me about “Does God use it?”, because God can use even terrible circumstances to bring about His plan. We are certainly seeing that with Joseph, are we not, in the Book of Genesis? He was betrayed by his brothers, and yet God used it to bring about the salvation of the masses with Israel being rescued during a time of famine, etc.

If you want to talk about “God uses it,” or “God allows it,” that is a great discussion to have. But there is a problem with “God causes it,” or “God arranged the Fall,” or “God caused the Fall,” because God is clothed in unapproachable light. To say that God causes evil is an impugning of God's character. We dealt with that a little bit, and then from there we moved into this idea: some are chosen unto life; but the vast majority of humanity are double predestined unto damnation. Because, after all, Jesus said,

*“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, there are few who find it”*  
(Matthew 7:13-14).

Basically, what I am hearing from Calvinists is that the vast majority of the human population are depraved, in the sense that they are in an insensate state, incapable of responding to God at all, even when the Holy Spirit convicts them. That is why the Holy Spirit has to impart the gift of faith to some, in their system. What they are basically saying is that salvation is not available to all. And yet the Bible over and over again says that salvation is available to all. The whole human race is savable, although they are not saved until they put their trust in the Messiah.

I showed you that in 2 Corinthians 5:19-20. I showed you that in two very famous passages that teach that God is not willing that any should perish: 1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9. And I showed you the “whosoever wills” passages. In fact, that is how the Bible ends: Revelation 22:17, Do you want the water of life if you are thirsty? Well, who can have it? Whosoever can have it. John 3:16,

*“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”*

There is no teaching at all in the Bible that salvation is somehow off-limits to certain people because they are non-elect. We pick it up with number 4. I am using this to rebut this idea that salvation is not available to everyone.

b) Salvation is Available to All

- 1) Everyone is savable but not necessarily saved (2 Cor. 5:19-20)
- 2) God desires all to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9)
- 3) Whosoever wills (John 3:16; Rom. 10:13; 1 John 5:1; Rev. 22:17)
- 4) **God commands all to repent (Acts 17:30)**
- 5) God's grace has appeared to all (Titus 2:11)
- 6) God is not a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11; Ephes. 6:9; Col. 3:25)

Now, I have actually been to Mars Hill twice, and stood in the spot where Paul gave his Acts 17 address. In fact, the first time I went was with Dr. Randall Price, and he, the tour guide, disappeared; and we were looking around and then all of a sudden he jumped out from behind some rocks dressed like the Apostle Paul. And then he gave Acts 17—the whole speech—by heart. So when I took people there, I explained what Randall Price did, and I said, "Do not expect that from me." But Acts 17 is a great speech in which Paul is interacting with the people on the Areopagus, unbelievers. And Paul says in Acts 17:30,

*"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent."*

"Repent" means to change your minds about who Jesus is. Why should you do that? Acts 17:31—

*"because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."*

So Paul gives the gospel, talks about the final judgment, and then he makes this statement that "All you people listening to me, you need to change your mind about who Jesus is." "Repent" is a synonym for "believe." In fact, later in Acts 17, it talks about how some believed. But notice the invitation is not just to a small group of people—it is to all people everywhere. And that is a nonsensical statement if most of the world's population cannot even respond to the gospel.

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Moving further into this doctrine that salvation is not available to everyone. I had you open up to John 1:9. Look at what John 1:9 says:

*"There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man."*

How could it enlighten every man if most of the world's population are like rocks in an insensate state, unable to respond to God? Jesus has come into the world and has given light to every single person.

In other words, every single person is in a position, particularly when the Holy Spirit convicts them, where they are capable of receiving truth. Now, tragically, many will take that truth and suppress it in unrighteousness; but that has to do with their volition—it does not have anything to do with their inability. If they did not have the ability to respond to truth, then John 1:9 is a very strange statement since it says that Jesus has come into the world to enlighten not just a small group of people, but every man. Titus 2:11 says the same thing:

*"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men."*

Now, does that mean that everybody is saved? No. But salvation has been brought to all men. That is just another example of what I have been trying to say.

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Another thing to understand is related to this idea that some are elect unto salvation, and others are programmed into hell with no choice, is that it makes God a respecter of persons. And the Bible basically says that God is not a respecter of persons. Now notice Calvin's own language in his "Institutes of the Christian Religion":

"By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death."<sup>4</sup>

So before a human being is even born, God already made a decision: that one is going to heaven; that one is going to hell. This is fine if you are in the camp that has been elected unto heaven, right? That is great. But the problem is that, as I will show you when we get to the "P" for Perseverance of the Saints, they themselves do not even know if they are one of the elect, because they have put themselves under an impossible standard. Have I persevered enough in faith and in good works to prove I am one of the elect?

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<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. 3, (Orlando, Signalman Publishing, from the 4th edition, 2009, Kindle edition), Chapter 21, section 5, Kindle location 17221.

This is why R. C. Sproul said at a huge event in Orlando, Florida, in front of 5,000 people, "We need to pray that Jim Boyce dies in the faith." Why would you pray that? "Because we are really not sure if he is one of the elect. Even though he is a guy that has been used by God all over the world, we really do not know if he is in or out, because we do not know if he has persevered till the end."

Now, my father-in-law passed away last year. Just a little before that, my own biological father passed away. And I can tell you that as people get older, they are mentally in and out. They have acuity in some cases, and in other cases they have no mental acuity. And if you are going to tell me that the person has to be in faith, in proper theology to their dying moment, I would have to question whether my own father was saved, or whether my father-in-law was saved. And yet, clearly they were saved, because they made obvious professions of faith earlier in their lives. So this is the sort of impossible standard that you move into when you move into this Calvinistic system.

There was a doctoral dissertation done on the Puritans: almost to a man, they went to their graves terrified, because they really did not know if they were one of the elect or not—because election in Calvinism is perseverance in the faith and in good works, which is a very subjective standard. And if there is any wavering there, maybe you are not one of the elect, even if you are a Jim Boyce. So—

"All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death."<sup>5</sup>

It is a fine statement if you are one of the elect; but even if you are one of the elect, you spend the rest of your life wondering if you are one of the elect. I will give you some quotes later on, when we get to the "P" for Perseverance of the Saints, of R. C. Sproul himself when he came on radio maybe a year or two before his death. It is like the weather report: "Do you know you are saved?" "Well, there is about a seventy percent chance of rain." And if that is the way you want to live as a Christian, you can do that; but you are living far beneath your privileges.

So even if you are one of the elect, you do not even know if you are one of the elect, which is a tragic thing. So is it true that all people are not created on equal terms, as Calvin blatantly says? Notice Acts 10:34.

*"Opening his mouth, Peter said: 'I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality.'"*

Romans 2:11, *"For there is no partiality with God."*

Ephesians 6:9, *"And masters, . . . both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him."*

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<sup>5</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. 3, (Orlando, Signalman Publishing, from the 4th edition, 2009, Kindle edition), Chapter 21, section 5, Kindle location 17221.

Colossians 3:25, *"For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality."*

Over and over again, it is said that God is not a respecter of persons. The offer of salvation is out there for anybody to respond to, regardless of color, creed, culture, socioeconomic status, and nationality.

And John Calvin is writing these things about the age of twenty-two or twenty-three. (That is when he wrote his "Institutes of the Christian Religion," when he was maybe twenty-five—in his twenties. Would you want something you wrote in your twenties to be turned into a theological movement? I sure would not. I preached my first sermon when I was about age twenty-two, and I just praise the Lord that it was before the internet, and there is no record of it anywhere. Whew!)

But John Calvin basically says that all "are not created on equal terms"—that is his language. I have given you several verses where God says the opposite. It is just a matter of who I am going to believe. What am I more impressed by: a system, or the Word of God? So the doctrine of omni-causality has problems, and the doctrine that salvation is not available to everyone has problems.

### 3. Calvinism's overstatement of Divine Sovereignty

- a) Omni-causality
- b) Salvation is available to all
- c) **Election proof texts (John 6:44; 15:16; Rom. 8:29-30)**
- d) Double predestination proof texts (Rom. 9)
- e) Loss of evangelism
- f) Loss of love for the lost (Ezek. 18:23, 32; 33:11)
- g) Babies in hell? (2 Sam. 12:19-24)

Now, what about the election proof texts that Calvinists refer to over and over again? Well a lot of them are just yanked out of context. One of them that is used frequently is John 6:44, and this one is so big that I am going to revisit it when we get to the "I" in the Calvinistic system, Irresistible Grace. It is Jesus speaking to the crowd at Capernaum after He had multiplied the fish and loaves. He makes this statement:

*"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws ('helkyo') him; and I will raise him up on the last day."*

Jonathan Smith and I went to a local debate between Leighton Flowers, non-Calvinist, and James White, Calvinist, here in Houston. And sure enough, James White, the Calvinist, was skillful enough to get the whole debate to revolve around this verse. And every time Leighton Flowers started to pull out things outside of this verse, James White would say, "Well, you are not agreeing to the terms of the debate."

We all understand that the person that controls the terms of the debate wins the debate. So that is why I am not the biggest fan of debates, because the person that wins it is usually the person that can frame the question. But it was in a local Houston Presbyterian church I went to see this, and sure enough, this is the James White verse:



*"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws ('helkyo') him; and I will raise him up on the last day."*

So to them it means that there it is, black and white: you cannot come to God unless God draws you. Who does God draw? He does not draw everybody, but the ones He draws are irresistibly drawn to Him. They have no choice in the matter. Resistance is futile.

That is the "I" in the Calvinistic system. And you look at a verse like John 6:44 and it sure looks like the Calvinists have won the day. But the problem is that John 6:40 comes before John 6:44. God did not just give us John 6:44. He gave us John 6:40, which comes before John 6:44. This is what John 6:40 says,

*"For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."*

So there is a part of it that makes it seem like this offer is going to everyone. And if you do not buy that, John 12, which Leighton Flowers kept trying to bring up in his debate with James White, also addresses this. James White said, "You cannot bring up John 12 because we said we were going to have a debate on John 6." I felt bad for Leighton Flowers—he was like an attorney that wanted to introduce evidence into a court of law. And he kept hearing from James White, "Objection, your Honor," "Objection, your Honor."

Let's look at John 12:32. John 12:32 uses the verb "helkyo," which means "to draw." In John 12:32 Jesus makes the statement,

*"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw ('helkyo') all men to Myself."*

"Helkyo," "draw," is the same verb that is used in John 6:44. So apparently this action of drawing that James White was trying to limit to the elect is not something that Jesus taught in John 12:32. Whatever you are doing with John 6:44, I would encourage you to factor in the whole Bible, because John 12 is just as inspired as John 6. So apparently this action of drawing goes out to the whole world. Now, what is this drawing? I believe that it is the convicting ministry of the Spirit.

The disciples were very, very panicked that Jesus was leaving, and so, in the Upper Room, just prior to His death, Jesus explained to the disciples that "it is to your advantage that I go away" (John 16:7). "So do not panic that I am leaving: it is actually to your advantage that I am going away." "Well, what do you mean, Jesus?" He says, "When I go, the Spirit is going to come, and He is going to start to do something:"

*"But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper"—"paraclete," the one who comes alongside to assist—"will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He, when He comes, will convict"—*

"Convict" meaning "persuade." Who is He going to convict? The world. The world of the elect? No, it does not say that. The whole world—everyone on planet Earth.

*—"the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:7-8).*

Notice that "sin," "hamartia," is a singular noun, because there is one sin that the world is committing against God right now. It is not pornography and abortion and spousal abuse, as bad as those things are. It is not a coarse, rough lifestyle. It is not materialism. The one sin that people are committing against God right now, that will send them into the lake of fire ultimately, if they persist in it, is unbelief. So the Holy Spirit, relative to the unsaved, is not trying to morally rectify unsaved people.

If you go up to an unsaved person and you try to morally change them, you are doing something that the Holy Spirit is not persuading them of. He is persuading them of the one sin that they are currently committing that will send them into the lake of fire—which is unbelief. Now, presumably, once a person is saved and the Holy Spirit comes into them, then the Holy Spirit will start to deal with them in other areas. But I am not talking about saved people now; I am talking about what the Holy Spirit is doing to unsaved people.

The Holy Spirit, Jesus said, is going to come and is going to convict the world "concerning sin, because they do not believe" (John 16:9). "Sin" is identified there as unbelief.

*"And concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me" (John 16:10).*

The world needs the transferred righteousness of Jesus. You cannot get into heaven through your own righteousness. It has to be alien righteousness: righteousness transferred to you positionally at the point of faith, at which point God the Father looks at you as if you are just as righteous as His Son. And if you do not have that righteousness, you ain't getting in. I cannot get in by my own fig leaves, as Adam and Eve were trying to do initially. So, the Holy Spirit is agitating people of the singular sin of unbelief, because they do not believe. They do not have the transferred righteousness of Jesus Christ.

*"And concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged" (John 16:11).*

Do you want to die in that condition? Do you want to go through your whole life—and every time the Spirit of God convicts you of your need to trust Christ for salvation, you say, "Nope," "Nope," "Nope," "Nope," "Nope," and you fight it, and you die in that condition? Then, having never received it, you are going down with Satan because this is his world and he is already a defeated foe.

So the fact that this is something that is going out to the whole world shows me that this drawing that God does is not just limited to the elect—it is for the whole planet. All of that goes against John 6:44 when taken in isolation to mean that the Spirit irresistibly draws some. Now, if I were stuck on a desert island and I just had John 6:44, then maybe I would think that. But I do not just have John 6:44—I have John 6:40. And if that is not convincing, I have John 12:32 which uses the same verb ("helkyo," "draw"). And if John 12:32 is not convincing enough, I have John 16:7-11, which says that the convicting ministry is for all, because Jesus paid the price for every salvation.

Every single human being on planet earth is savable—not saved until they receive as a free gift God's provision—but savable nonetheless. You will also find in the Calvinistic system a frequent use of John 15:16, in which Jesus makes the statement:

*"You did not choose Me, but I chose you,"—*

Most people stop reading there, but there is more.

*—"and appointed you that you would go and bear what fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you."*

So the choosing, although it is typically used here as a choice of some unto salvation, if you look at the whole verse, Jesus is talking about an election unto service—an election unto fruit bearing. Paul the apostle said over and over again that he was chosen for the office of apostle. That is the kind of choice that Jesus is talking about here. He is not talking about a choice of some unto salvation. In fact, I do not think He is even dealing with the subject of salvation there, because the people that He is talking to are the eleven disciples in the Upper Room. The only unbeliever in the group, Judas, has left the building (John 13).

So Jesus is dealing here with an election unto—not salvation, which has already occurred—but unto fruit bearing. So whenever you have these election verses thrown at you by Calvinists—and they will throw a lot of them at you—just step back and look at the whole verse and see what it is dealing with.

And then here comes the big kahuna. This is the big Calvinistic kahuna right here: Acts 13:48. This is on Paul's first missionary journey; he has gone into southern Galatia to proclaim the gospel and plant churches. Doctor Luke, in the book of Acts, gives a record of Paul's ministry activity; and in the process, Luke writes this:

*"When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed ('tasso') to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48).*

The Calvinists when asked, "Well, who believed?" will say, "Those that had been appointed." "What about those that hadn't been appointed?" "Tough tacos—no way, Jose." So here is the way the Calvinists want this verse to read: God in eternity past appointed some to salvation—that was the decision that God sovereignly made. Therefore, when people got saved, God caused it because He gave the gift of faith to those who are so fortunate as to be elected unto God. He imparted to them the gift of faith because they do not really have an ability to believe anyway, because as I showed in our treatment of total depravity, the Calvinists think that people are like rocks with an inability to believe. So God appointed—that is election, eternity past—some believed, and the ones that believed are those that God gave the gift of faith to. He gave the gift of faith to those that He had made a predetermined decision about, that they are one of the elect.

Now, I have to be honest with you, when you look at a verse like that, it looks like it has a lot of merit for the Calvinistic system. But when you are reading a theologian and they make a point, and they list a bunch of verses in parentheses to back up their point, the key thing to do is to ask yourself, "Is the tail wagging the dog?" In other words, "Are they using a bunch of verses out of context to support an a priori theological presupposition?" Because at the end of the day, you do not want to take your theology and read it back into the Bible. That is dangerous. You want to get your theology from the Bible.

And in forensic work, when people investigate crimes, if you ask someone who is really good at it—and I hope they would be, if that is what they do—they try not to develop a theory on the case too early. They try not to say, "Well, that person is the bad guy," because the human temptation is to try to make the evidence fit your theory, which leads to wrongful convictions. What you want to do is build your theory from the evidence. So the question is, are the Calvinists using Acts 13:48 properly?

Here is a quote from Lawrence Vance, who wrote a book called "The Other Side of Calvinism." Here he highlights the importance of Acts 13:48.

"Every Calvinist, no matter what else he believes, uses this verse to prove Unconditional Election. Every Calvinist claims that on the basis of this verse, every person who has ever been saved, (Old or New Testament) or ever will be saved (Church age or Tribulation or Millennium) was 'ordained to life' before the foundation of the world by a sovereign, eternal decree."<sup>6</sup>

And I have to be honest with you that Acts 13:48, as I read it in the New American Standard Bible, does look that way. But let me give you, as has been said, the other side of the story. I have eight things to say on this.

### **Acts 13:48**

1. One verse cannot be used to undo hundreds of others (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9)
2. Sometimes the Greek word for "appointed"(NASB) or "ordained" (KJV) is translated "wanted" (LB) or "disposed" (REB) in other English translations
3. *Tassō* is used (rather than *proorizō*), which never refers to predestination unto Salvation in any of its other New Testament uses (Matt. 28:16; Luke 7:38; Acts 15:2; 22:10; 28:23; Rom. 13:1; 1 Cor. 16:15)
4. The corrupted, Roman Catholic Latin Vulgate mistranslates *tassō* as "preordained."
5. The context of the book of Acts pertains to the predisposition of the Gentiles (rather than the Jews) toward the Gospel (Acts 13:44-47; 28:26-28)

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<sup>6</sup> Laurence M. Vance, *The Other Side of Calvinism*, rev. ed. (Pensacola, FL: Vance Publications, 1999); citing Calvin, Institutes, 345.

6. There is no textual or exegetical evidence that the divine appointing (*tassō*) caused the believing (*pisteuō*).
7. Contrary to many English translations, the word order of Acts 13:48 in the Greek text places the verb "believed" before the Greek verb pre-ordained "appointed."
8. In Acts 13:48, "believed" is in the active voice.

The first thing to understand about it is that one verse cannot be used to undo hundreds of other verses. We know from 1 Timothy 2:3-4 that God "desires all men to be saved":

*"This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."*

Second Peter 3:9 says,

*"The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."*

I cannot use Acts 13:48 to undo hundreds of other verses that teach the opposite of how Acts 13:48 appears. That is the first thing to understand.

The second thing to understand about Acts 13:48 is that it is translated "appointed" in the New American Standard Bible, but you will notice that it reads differently in other English translations. Sometimes the Greek word for "appointed" in the New American Standard Bible or King James Version, is translated "wanted" (Living Bible), which waters down the Calvinist position, or "disposed" in the REB and other English translations.

The third thing to understand is that this verb "appointed" is "tasso" in the Greek. It is very interesting that "tasso" is used rather than "proorizo." There are election verses elsewhere, and it is typically "proorizo" that is used. You might recognize in "-orizo" the word "horizon"—God marking out the horizons ahead of time. It is interesting that the word "proorizo" is not found in Acts 13:48, instead the word "tasso" is used. And it is interesting that the verb "tasso" never refers to predestination or to salvation in any of its other New Testament usages. In other words, if this verb "tasso," "appointed" (unto eternal life), means an election unto salvation, then that is a use of the verb "tasso" that is never found elsewhere. There are the other verses in parentheses: Matthew 28:16, Luke 7:38, Acts 15:2, Acts 22:10, Acts 28:23, Romans 13:1, and 1 Corinthians 16:15.

"Tasso" is used of Jesus saying things like "He took them to a mountain that he had designated," and things of that nature, but never once is it ever used anywhere of "you are going to heaven; you are not." So if "tasso" is in fact used that way in Acts 13:48, then that would be the first time it was. That is something else to factor in.

Number 4: The Latin Vulgate was created by Jerome around the fourth century, I think. Jerome was trying to translate the Bible from Greek and Hebrew into Latin, which was the lingua franca of the day. His translation is called the Vulgate because as you might recognize the word "vulgar" in that word "Vulgate," as in, common speech, earthy speech. We typically use "vulgar" to describe profanity, but the Vulgate means that Jerome was taking the Greek New Testament and Hebrew Old Testament and translating them into the language of the common man.

So when Jerome translated Acts 13:48, how did he translate "tasso"? He translated it as "preordained." That is where this translation of "tasso" in Acts 13:48 came from. Other English translations do not do that, but Jerome says that "tasso" means "preordained."

Now, one of the things to understand about the Latin Vulgate is that it is basically the Roman Catholic translation. In the 16th century, Luther, when he translated the Greek and Hebrew into the language of the German people, because he did not want the German people to be under the influence of the papacy he did not use the Latin Vulgate in his translation.

In fact, I went on a pre-Reformation tour and saw the room and the area where all of this happened. This was right before the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. We went and visited all of the Protestant Reformation famous sites. We went to Wittenberg, Germany, and of course, they have the tourist traps set up there (they even sell Martin Luther socks). It is a fascinating tour to take in all this, and they actually take you to the place where Luther did his translation work. I think he spent eleven weeks on the New Testament, translating it from Greek into German, and then the Old Testament took him eleven years. A lot of that had to do with the fact that he was under duress, constantly running from place to place, so the Old Testament took him a lot longer. Plus, the Old Testament is longer.

But as the guide was explaining all this, I asked a very pointed question. I said, "When Luther did his translation work, did he use the Latin Vulgate?" And she said as strongly as you can say in German, "Absolutely not. He did not use the Latin Vulgate because he did not trust it. He thought it was a Roman Catholic edition, so he did all of his translation work from Hebrew and Greek into German, completely bypassing the Latin Vulgate because he did not trust it."

So, since "preordained" is translated from "tasso" in the Latin Vulgate, then I have to say, "I do not know if I am very trustful of it."

Number 5: the context of the Book of Acts pertains to the predisposition of the Gentiles, rather than the Jews, towards the gospel. Let's go to Acts 13:46.

*"Since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles."*

The same thing is said at the end of the book in Acts 28:26-28. So when I see this word "appointed" ("tasso"), which is probably not the best translation of it, it is probably better to understand it as "wanted" or "disposed," rather than "appointed."

I see that in the larger context of how God has arranged things in the Book of Acts, so that the Gentiles as a whole were now open to the gospel; the Jews, on the other hand, were becoming hardened to the gospel. This is a common theme that you see through the Book of Acts. "Wanted" or "disposed" might be a better understanding of "tasso" than the Calvinistic understanding—that God has elected certain people unto life. It is more the idea that the Gentiles are now in a position where they are more predisposed to receive the gospel than the Jews, and that fits perfectly the context of Acts 13:46.

Number 6: there is no textual or exegetical evidence that the divine appointing caused the believing. So the Calvinist, when he reads Acts 13:48—

*"When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed ('tasso') to eternal life believed."*

—wants a causation between appointed and believing. Why did some believe? Because God elected them before the foundations of the earth, and caused them to believe by imparting to them something that they do not have an ability to have: the gift of faith. So what the Calvinists want in this translation in Acts 13:48 is the concept of causation.

The problem with that is that there is a way to express causation—in Greek it is called the "hoti" clause—which is absent here. So I consulted my friend Dennis Rokser, who has done a lot of studying of these kinds of things, and I said, "I am coming up to Acts 13:48. Can you help me?" Here is the email he sent:

"[It is incorrect to say that] . . . the Greek verb for 'believe' ('episteusan') is the result of the perfect passive participle 'appointed' ('tetagmenoi'). Grammatically, all that the aorist tense verb 'believe' shows when it is combined with the periphrastic construction of 'had been appointed' is the appointing on God's part preceded the believing on man's part. NOTE: the grammar does not prove that one is the result of the other! In order to show that the act of believing was the result of or caused by God's prior appointing, there would need to be a causal conjunction in the Greek text after 'believed' ('episteusan'), so that the verse would say: 'and believed ['episteusan'], because ['hoti,' 'hina,' 'hos,' 'hoste'] they had been appointed to life eternal.'<sup>7</sup>—

The Calvinistic system wants one to cause the other, but there is not a causation here, because there is not the "because" or the clause.

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<sup>7</sup> Personal email correspondence from Dennis Rokser

–"The conjunctions 'hoti,' 'hina,' 'hos,' 'hoste' are all used at times in Greek (most often 'hoti') to show purpose, result or cause. But Acts 13:48 contains none of these! Calvinists assume that God foreordains certain people (those unconditionally elected to eternal salvation) to receive the gift of faith. If that were the case, then this verse should say, 'and as many as were appointed to believe received life eternal.' There are no verses in the Bible that say we were preordained to believe. Acts 13:48 simply doesn't say WHY the Galatians were appointed to eternal life. However, since the context of the passage involves human responsibility (v. 46), and it is consistent with Scripture elsewhere, we should interpret v. 48 to mean that God's ordaining must have factored in their faith, which He foresaw."<sup>8</sup>

So Rokser is saying that one is not causing the other. It could be a situation where God knows that certain people are going to be saved, therefore they are appointed. That is his view on it. But one thing you cannot say is that God appointed these people unto salvation, and therefore their believing was caused.

Contrary to many English translations, the word order of Acts 13:48 in the Greek text places the word "believed" before the verb "preordained"/"appointed." So you read this in the NASB and it puts "appointed" before believing. So you get the impression that the appointing caused the believing. Guess how it reads in Greek? The believing is in front of the appointing. So that is something that needs to be brought up in the whole discussion.

Number 7: The last thing I will bring to your attention is that this word "believed" right here (Acts 13:48) is in the active voice. It is not in the passive voice, as though something were done to you—faith is a gift—faith is imparted to you because you cannot believe. If that were true, "believe" ("pisteuo") would be in the passive voice. However, it is not in the passive voice: it is in the active voice, meaning the person that believed is doing something.

So you put all of this together, and you start to realize that a verse has been hijacked to support an a priori theological grid that states that God made a choice and caused certain people to believe. Acts 13:48 is not saying that. I will come back to this because this is a big deal in the Calvinistic system.

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<sup>8</sup> Personal email correspondence from Dennis Rokser