

Neo-Calvinism vs. the Bible 021

Acts 13:48

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Let's open our Bibles to Acts 13:48. In Sunday School, we are continuing our critique of what is called Neo-Calvinism.

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

We are basically taking the structure of Calvinism, TULIP, and running it through the grid of Scripture, asking ourselves, "Are these things so?" We have completed Total Depravity and we have moved into Unconditional Election, the "U."

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

When you get into this subject of divine sovereignty versus human free will, the truth of the matter is that I do not even try to solve it—I used to. I see passages that indicate that God chooses us, and I see other passages that indicate we choose Him, like a marriage. Did you choose your wife or did your wife choose you? I hope the answer is "Yes,"—to both of those. So I have looked at election and free will that way for a long time.

B. Unconditional Election

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

Since we are getting ready for the Chafer Theological Seminary conference beginning on Monday, here is what Chafer Theological Seminary says about this in its doctrinal statement:

"We believe Scripture reveals two clear and indisputable lines of evidence. One line shows God's 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)." ¹

So I at that particular point just claim mystery. I do not know how it works, but there it is. However, Calvinism pushes the envelope greatly here, in the sense that they teach a doctrine called double predestination: meaning that there are certain people elected unto salvation; and, as I understand it, the majority of the human race is elected unto damnation with no opportunity for choice whatsoever.

It flows from their "T," Total Depravity, which they misunderstand as meaning that man is in some kind of insensate state, like a rock, unable to respond to God at all, even when God convicts them. So God does a work on the front end. He regenerates so people can believe—He imparts the gift of faith because man cannot believe on his own. Who gets those good things? The elect.

So if you are fortunate enough to be one of the elect, it is a great idea; but what if you are one of those that is not the elect? Then you are passed over. You go into eternal damnation without even the ability to respond to God. And somehow God is glorified through that.

John Calvin wrote in his "Institutes of the Christian Religion,"

"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." ²

So somehow, as the flames are rising throughout eternity against the tormented person who had no choice in the matter but to end up in hell, God is glorified in that. Dave Hunt wrote a response to some of these things called "What Love is This?"—this is a different God from the one we read about in the Bible.

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

¹ Chafer Theological Seminary Distinctives: Election, <https://www.chafer.edu/soteriology>.

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

- f) Loss of love for the lost (Ezek. 18:23, 32; 33:11)
- g) Babies in hell? (2 Sam. 12:19-24)

So here on number 3 we are reacting to Calvinism's overstatement of divine sovereignty. We are at letter "c." I was trying to show you last time that a lot of the texts that Calvinists use to support this doctrine, double predestination, are yanked out of context.

So last time in our chronological march through these different verses, I was trying to show you what they are doing with Acts 13:48. I am going to revisit Acts 13:48 with you briefly, and then we will move on to some other texts that they use to support their doctrine of double predestination.

So you are reading the Book of Acts (by the way, we are teaching the Book of Acts on Wednesday nights—we are in Acts 12) and Paul goes off on his first missionary journey into southern Galatia and preaches the gospel. Folks, particularly Gentiles, start getting saved. Then you read Acts 13:48 in the midst of that context—

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

Lawrence Vance, a critic of Calvinism, says this about Acts 13:48:

"Every Calvinist, no matter what else he believes, uses this verse [Acts 13:48] 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."³

So when it says in Acts 13:48 in the NASB (1995 update), *"as many as had been appointed ['tasso' (τάσσω)] to eternal life believed,"* the Calvinist comes to that verse and interprets it a particular way. In my opinion, they are hijacking the verse to fit their preexisting system. I will explain why I think that in just a second. But here is the Calvinistic interpretation: God in eternity past picked who was going to be saved and who was not. So that is what is meant by "appointed" in their understanding.

And then Calvinists say of those that believed in southern Galatia in Acts 13, "This has been happening since the beginning, ever since man fell. After the elect were eternally selected by God, appointed before the foundations of the earth, then God caused the elect to believe. So they were imparted something: they were regenerated first so that they could believe—they were imparted the gift of faith. It really is not any active faith of their own, if they have any active faith of their own. God caused their belief to happen; and as God caused that to happen, some became believers."

³ Laurence M. Vance, *The Other Side of Calvinism*, rev. ed. (Pensacola, FL: Vance Publications, 1999); citing Calvin, Institutes, 345.

You read Acts 13:48 and you say, "Wow, maybe there is something to this Calvinism because that is the way it certainly reads in the New American Standard Bible." So let me make eight points about Acts 13:48, because when you get into this subject of Calvinism, that verse is going to come up at some point. I think when you put these eight points together, you will see that Acts 13:48 is not teaching what Calvinists say it is teaching. Acts 13:48 has been taken and reconfigured to fit into an overarching blueprint that Calvinists have already embraced when they interpret the verse.

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) .
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.

My first point here is one verse cannot be used to undo hundreds of others. When you are coming up with an interpretation of something that goes against the grain of countless verses in the Bible, then maybe you should rethink your interpretation, because at the end of the day, God's Word cannot contradict itself. Now, my interpretations of God's Word can contradict other areas of Scripture. When that happens, there is not really a problem with God's Word—there is a problem with my interpretation of it, because God's Word is infallible. My interpretations of God's Word are not infallible.

I work very hard to make sure that from this pulpit that I am interpreting the Bible in a way that the Bible wants to be interpreted. But there is the risk in any Bible teacher who has a fallen sin nature and is not omniscient like God is. You can come up with something that you think is God's Word, but it really is not God's Word—it is your interpretation of God's Word. In a lot of cases, it is a misinterpretation. And you are probably on the grounds of a misinterpretation when you are trying to say something that the rest of the Bible is not saying. That is a clue.

It is as if you are driving your car and your warning light comes on (as mine came on recently): low tire, or right headlight out. The warning light gives the indication: "Uh oh, something's not right here." So when you are reading the Bible in a way that is different from how the Bible presents itself elsewhere, that is your warning light that something is not right here. And in that scenario you do not rewrite the Bible: you rewrite your interpretation.

Because the issue of pride is so strong, we all want to be right all the time. By the way, being right is overrated because when my wife and I get into an argument, and she says, "I am right," and I say, "No, I am right," all of a sudden we are in separate places of the house with the doors closed and you are all by yourself, and you are saying to yourself, "Being right is kind of overrated. Because I got married so that, 'man shall not be alone'" (Genesis 2:18, paraphrase). We all want to be right, but sometimes being right is overrated.

The human temptation is to try to dig your heels in on an interpretation, when God is saying, "Here is a chance to be what some would call hermeneutically humble, and say, 'Well, maybe my understanding of the verse is wrong.'"

So, one verse cannot be used to undo hundreds of others. The two classic verses, 1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9, clearly say that God wants all to be saved. All are not saved until they trust in the Savior, but God's desire is that every single human being on planet Earth would trust in the work of the Savior and be saved. First Timothy 2:4 clearly says of God that He *"desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth."* Then 2 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" (2 Peter 3:9).

I cannot interpret Acts 13:48 in a way that is out of harmony with these two passages (1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9). That is the first thing to think about when you look at Acts 13:48.

Now, I am reading out of the New American Standard Bible (1995 update), and in Acts 13:48, it interprets the Greek verb "tasso" [τάσσω] as "appointed." But what is interesting is that "appointed" is not how "tasso" [τάσσω] is interpreted in other English translations.

This is number 2: sometimes the Greek word for "appointed" (New American Standard Bible) or "ordained" (King James Version) is translated as "wanted" or "disposed of" in other English translations. As you move into some of these other English translations, the translation of "tasso" [τάσσω] softens the Calvinistic interpretation of it. *"When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as"— "wanted"—"disposed of"—not "appointed" or "ordained"—came to believe.* That is another thing to look at. It softens a very dogmatic Calvinistic reading of Acts 13:48.

Number 3: "tasso" [τάσσω], translated "appointed" in the NASB (New American Standard Bible) is used rather than "proorizo" [προορίζω], which is, interestingly, the word that is used elsewhere when talking about divine sovereignty. "Proorizo" [προορίζω]—"pro-": first; you might recognize in "-orizo" "horizon." But what is interesting is in Acts 13:48, "proorizo" [προορίζω] is not even used. Instead "tasso" [τάσσω] is.

"Tasso" [τάσσω] never refers to predestination unto salvation in any of its other New Testament usages. "Tasso" [τάσσω] is used eight other times in the New Testament; and you can go through them all and you will see that it never refers to a person being appointed or not to salvation. It is used to describe things like Jesus called his disciples and went to a mountain to pray, designating ("tasso," [τάσσω]) a certain mountain.

But never is it ever used anywhere in the New Testament of "This person's going to heaven."—"This person's going to hell." So if "tasso" [τάσσω] is being used that way in Acts 13:48, it would be out of harmony with how the verb is used every other time in Scripture. That is another factor to think through.

So why is it that all these English translations are translating "tasso" [τάσσω] as "preordained"? Well, that leads to point number 4: the corrupted Roman Catholic Latin Vulgate is the first, as far as I know, which mistranslates "tasso" [τάσσω] as "appointed," or in this case, "(pre)ordained."

The Latin Vulgate, created by Jerome, a translation around the fourth century A.D., involved Jerome taking Greek and Hebrew and translating it into Latin. That is why it is called the Latin Vulgate. You might recognize in that word "Vulgate" the word "vulgar" as in common. The Latin Vulgate was an attempt to put the Bible which was in Greek and Hebrew into the language of the common man.

One of the things I shared with you last time is that Martin Luther, the great church reformer, did not trust the Latin Vulgate. He thought it was a Roman Catholic translation. He did not trust it. And I have actually been to Wittenberg, Germany, just prior to the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. We took a trip there, and had a tour guide that took us through all these different sites.

And they took us to the place where Luther, in his time period, translated from the Greek and Hebrew into the language of the German people because he believed in what is called the priesthood of all believers, meaning that everyone should be able to read the Bible on their own.

Luther was very much into translation. If I remember the story right, he took about eleven months to translate the New Testament, and about eleven years to translate the Old Testament. And the reason it took him so much longer with the Old Testament is that he was a marked man and had to avoid people trying to kill him. That sort of thing has a tendency to disrupt your academic work. So he was moving from place to place.

But I did ask a very pointed question of the tour guide, who is an expert in all of these things that happened in the Protestant Reformation. I said, "When Luther did his translation work, did he translate from the original Greek and Hebrew into German, or did he instead translate from the Latin Vulgate into the language of the German people?"

And the tour guide was very dogmatic that he did not use the Latin Vulgate. He went from Greek and Hebrew into German. The question is, "Why didn't he ever use the Latin Vulgate?" And the basic answer is that he did not trust it. He thought it was a Roman Catholic translation.

So all of that to say, that when you are using this word "tasso" [τάσσω] as preordained, you are bringing it from the Latin Vulgate, which is something that Luther himself mistrusted. That is another factor that needs to be brought in when you hear Calvinists using this passage.

Number 5: the context of the Book of Acts pertains to the predisposition of the Gentiles rather than that of the Jews, toward the gospel. So if you go to Acts 13:46, it says,

"Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, 'It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles'" (Acts 13:46).

So who is it that is being predisposed to believe the gospel? It is the whole Gentile population. And that goes on over and over again in the Book of Acts. In fact, everywhere Paul goes in the Book of Acts, he goes to the synagogue first (unless they do not have a synagogue, like in Philippi). He proclaims the truth of Jesus in the synagogue using the Hebrew Bible. And essentially the same thing happens over and over again: the Jewish people reject it. And then Paul says, "Fine, I will go share the same truth with the Gentiles," and he reaps a massive harvest.

I have taught about Paul in the Book of Acts before, at the College of Biblical Studies. I told the students, "Look, if I ask you a question on the test: 'What did Paul do in such and such a city?' just say this: 'He went to the synagogue first; they rejected the gospel in the synagogue; and then he took the truth of Jesus to the Gentile world, and they received it in droves.'"

And I said, "If you put that down on the test, you have got about a ninety-nine percent chance of getting the question right, because that is what happens with Paul everywhere he goes in the Book of Acts." (The only exceptions being in places like Philippi where there is no preexisting synagogue.)

So, the predisposition of the Gentiles is a dominant theme of the Book of Acts. As you go through the Book of Acts, you just cannot miss it. So when Acts 13:48 talks about certain people being predisposed to believe, I do not think that it is a statement that the elect that God has chosen are believing. I think that it is the idea that Israel's heart is becoming increasingly hard against Jesus, but the Gentiles are wide open. That is a completely different reading from the Calvinist reading.

Acts 13:48 is just speaking of the predisposition of the Gentiles towards believing the gospel as opposed to the Jews. It has nothing to do with God marking some out for salvation and forcing, or causing, them to believe. So it is just a matter of taking Acts 13:48 and putting it into its context.

You have to watch systematic theologians very carefully, because they have a tendency to make a theological point and then list all the verses that supposedly support their point. Those verses do not prove anything if they are not being used in context. Your average person will look at that and say, "Wow, that is impressive. They just cited five–six–seven verses." "They just cited Acts 13:48."

But I am not impressed by it. I used to be impressed by things like that, but I am not impressed by it at all, anymore. What impresses me is people that actually use the Scripture contextually. Just saying that God elects someone to salvation and quoting Acts 13:48 proves absolutely nothing if that is not what Acts 13:48 is speaking of. So that is why, in this church, we are a believer in verse by verse teaching; because as long as the teachers here are moving through the Bible, verse by verse, the human tendency is limited to yank verses out of context to support a preexisting structure.

Number 6: there is no textual or exegetical evidence that the divine appointing caused the believing. The way Calvinists want Acts 13:48 to read is that God appointed some and caused them to believe. That is the standard Calvinistic interpretation. But there is no textual or exegetical evidence that the divine appointing caused the believing. I see both the Greek word for "appointing": "tasso" [τάσσω], and the Greek word for "believing": "pisteuo" [πιστεύω], in Acts 13:48. But did the appointing cause the believing? That is what I want to know.

At first glance, when you read Acts 13:48 in English, it looks like maybe there is a case for it; but that is not the way the Greek reads at all. I gave you this email correspondence with my friend who is very good on these kinds of soteriological issues, among other issues. I said, "I am coming up to Acts 13:48." "Help!" is basically what I said. He sent me this email correspondence.

Dr. Dennis Rokser says, concerning the lack of evidence for causation in Acts 13:48,

"[It is incorrect to say that]... the Greek word for 'believe' ('episteusan') is the result of the perfect passive participle 'appointed' ('tetagmenoi'). Grammatically, all the aorist tense verb of 'believe' shows when it is combined with the periphrastic construction of 'had been appointed' is that 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.'"⁴

⁴ Personal email correspondence from Dennis Rokser.

The "because" expressed by "hoti," "hina," "hos," "hoste," etc., is absent in the text. It is as if the Calvinistic system reads the word "because" connecting "appointing" and "believing"—but it is not there in the Greek. So that is another reason that I think this text that they use constantly is hijacked.

"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.'"⁵

If Acts 13:48 is saying that God picks people and causes them, as a result of picking, to believe, then Acts 13:48 would say, "and as many as were appointed to believe received eternal life." But that is not what the passage says. It does not say, "as many as were appointed to believe received eternal life." It says, "as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48). You see the difference. The idea that the appointing causes the believing is absent. That is what Pastor Rokser is trying to say. He goes on and says,

"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,"⁶—

He is coming up with an interpretation of this that harmonizes with the bulk of the biblical data. He is not coming up with an interpretation at odds with the rest of the biblical data.

—"we should interpret v. 48 to mean that God's ordaining must have factored in their faith which He foresaw."⁷

Dr. Rokser is a believer in what is called the prescience understanding of election. Basically "prescience" means "pre-knowledge" ("science": "knowledge"): God looked down through the corridors of time and foresaw who was going to believe and who was not. So what does God do? He picks winners. He picks the people that He knows are going to pick him.

So what Pastor Rokser is saying is that God foresaw, there in southern Galatia (Acts 13), who was going to believe and who was not going to believe, and He made His appointing ("tasso" [τάσσω]) accordingly. This is the prescience understanding of election.

⁵ Personal email correspondence from Dennis Rokser.

⁶ Personal email correspondence from Dennis Rokser.

⁷ Personal email correspondence from Dennis Rokser.

Dennis Rokser is coming up with that legitimate view; and he is saying that it is a much more credible view than the view that one forced the other; rather than saying that the appointing caused the believing. Acts 13:48 is saying that God saw who would believe and He appointed. This is very, very different from what you get from Calvinism: God appointed and essentially coerced belief—caused them to believe. Acts 13:48 is not saying that, because there is no causation in this verse.

Number 7: contrary to many English translations, the word order of Acts 13:48, in the Greek text, places the word "believed" ("pisteuo" [πιστεύω]) before the verb "preordained" ("tasso" [τάσσω]). That is why this is tricky. As you read Acts 13:48, it has the appointing first and the believing second: *"as many as had been appointed ('tasso' [τάσσω]) to eternal life believed ('pisteuo' [πιστεύω])."*

Read Acts 13:48 in English and it has appointing first and believing second. That opens the door for a Calvinistic understanding of this. But when you read this in Greek—we all know that the Bible was not written in English, but in Koine Greek, right?—the order is the exact opposite: believing is mentioned first; appointing is mentioned second. Is that not interesting? So in Greek, believing ("pisteuo" [πιστεύω]) is number 1 in the chronological order of the verse and appointing ("tasso" [τάσσω]) is number 2.

If you read Acts 13:48 in English, because appointing appears first, you would think it is the important thing. But if you were to read Acts 13:48 in Greek, you would say, "No, the appointing is not the most important thing. Everything is important, but the believing is the most important because it is mentioned first—before the appointing."

Ron Merryman, writing in the "Grace Family Journal," points this out:

"The verb 'believed' (aorist tense, active voice, indicative mode) stands first in word order in the Greek text, thus it is emphasized. The statement literally is, 'And they believed, as many as were ordained unto eternal life' (a perfect tense periphrastic in Greek). They did not believe because they were ordained to eternal life."⁸

In other words, not only is the word order different in Greek from English, but there is no "hoti" ("because") clause indicating that one causes the other.

Here is the reality, folks: in the heat of argument or debate or seeing a screenshot of something on social media, you are never going to get all this background. You are going to get a citation of a verse and a bunch of philosophers saying, "Case closed: Calvinism is true." But I am giving you what they used to call it in news the other side of the story.

Number 8: in Acts 13:48, "believed" is in the active voice. So when Acts 13:48 says, "and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed," "believed" ("pisteuo" [πιστεύω] in Greek) is in the active voice, not the passive voice. The passive voice is something that is done to you. The active voice is something you do. See the difference?

⁸ Ron Merryman, "Election & Acts 13:48," *Grace Family Journal*, September-October 2000.

If Luke wanted to say that God chose people before the foundations of the earth to be His elect and then cause them to believe by imparting to them the gift of faith (because God has to do it that way, since people—Total Depravity—cannot believe on their own), then "believe" ("pisteuo" [πιστεύω]) in Acts 13:48 certainly would not be in the active voice. It would be in the passive voice, because the active voice is something these people did, not something done to them.

Again, I am getting this point from Ron Merryman:

"Simply, they believed; that is, they actively (active voice) expressed positive volition toward the Gospel..."⁹

Now, the Gentiles may have been predisposed to an understanding of the gospel in comparison to the Jews, because that is the whole point that is happening in the Book of Acts. But that is not an individual election situation. That is just God indicating that the Gentiles were more predisposed to understanding these things and believing these things than the Jews.

The Jews, nationally, going all the way back to Matthew 12, had already made a decision that they were going to reject their king; and they were given over to a spirit of darkness and stupor, as divine discipline for that national decision. The Gentiles, by contrast, were very, very different. They were open to the gospel. I think that is what is really meant by "tasso" [τάσσω], and that fits the tenor of the Book of Acts. Ron Merriman says,

"Simply, they believed; that is, they actively (active voice) expressed positive volition towards the Gospel... 'Believed' or 'believe' is consistently active in voice in its over 100 usages in the N.T. relative to trust in Christ and in Him alone."¹⁰

Notice the great Bible study methodology that Merryman is using here. He is saying, "Hey, my view of this is not some view that contradicts every other verse in the Bible. I am coming up with an interpretation that harmonizes with every other verse of the Bible. And if that happens to violate my preexisting theology, I am not going to force the verse into my theology. Maybe it is time I readjust my theology."

Theology is a wonderful subject, but theology is only as good as the text it is found in. If the text is not supporting your theology, your human tendency is to try to rewrite the text. But that is no way to approach God's Word. We want to readjust our theology, not the Bible. You cannot readjust the Bible because it is God's eternal Word, but you can readjust your misunderstanding of the Bible.

⁹ Ron Merryman, "Election & Acts 13:48," *Grace Family Journal*, September-October 2000.

¹⁰ Ron Merryman, "Election & Acts 13:48," *Grace Family Journal*, September-October 2000.

And this is where the emotional explosion happens in people, because they have believed something so long, and have taught something so long; and all of their favorite people that they hear on media teach it that way; and all the books that they have read teach it that way. They come to a crisis in which they are trying to figure out that, "You know what? God really is not saying what I thought He was saying."

We are all brought to that point of crisis. I have been brought to that point of crisis many times, not so much on this subject, but on other subjects. And I just have to say, "You know what, Lord? I am sorry. I want my theology to be readjusted according to what Your Word says, not the other way around."

But many times, what happens to people is an emotional explosion, and you say, "Why are they so emotional about this? Why can't they talk to me in a calm, reasoned manner? Why are they getting angry?" Well, there is a reason they are getting angry. It is discovering that they have had it wrong and that everybody they liked had it wrong. And no one likes to be wrong. But as I said before, being right is overrated.

So I love what Merryman is saying here. He says,

"'Believed' or 'believe' is consistently active in voice in its over 100 usages in the N.T. relative to trusting in Christ and Him alone. That means the person who believes is actively, not passively, trusting in the Gospel. They are exercising their faith, not someone else's and not a faith given to them..."¹¹

Calvinism says, "It is not your faith; it is the gift of faith." And what we are saying in this is, "No, it is your faith, or else 'believe(d)' would be in the passive voice." If it is someone else's faith, divine faith, the gift of faith, "believe(d)" would be in the passive voice, not the active voice.

"Contrasted to the ones that believed in the context are those that did not."¹²

Now look at those who rejected. Who does Paul blame in Acts 13:46 when people reject it? He does not blame the devil. He does not say, "Well, you all can't help yourselves because you are rocks anyway." He blames them. In other words, if a person is an unbeliever, it is their fault. Nobody else can be blamed. Paul would not have blamed the unbelievers if Calvinism's view of total depravity is true, and if their view that faith is a gift is true.

Merryman goes on and says,

"We are told that 'they spake against the things that were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming' (v.45)."¹³

¹¹ Ron Merryman, "Election & Acts 13:48," *Grace Family Journal*, September-October 2000.

¹² Ron Merryman, "Election & Acts 13:48," *Grace Family Journal*, September-October 2000.

¹³ Ron Merryman, "Election & Acts 13:48," *Grace Family Journal*, September-October 2000.

Who is to blame for these unbelievers? They spoke against these things.

"...They were actively expressing their negative volition to the Gospel, so that Paul follows their blasphemies with the statement '...you put it (the word expressed in the Gospel he had just spoken) from you and you judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life' (v. 46)." ¹⁴

As you go down to Acts 13:46, you see that Paul keeps saying, "Some of you are rejectors, and it is your own fault." So if it is the fault of the unbeliever, then it is also something to be complimented in the believer. That is what the active voice means. It is used with both believers and unbelievers. If you are going to condemn unbelievers for rejecting the gospel, then you should commend the believers for receiving the gospel because they just made a choice through their own volition.

Merryman says,

"These verbs also are active voice. They could not blame their negativeness on Satan or any other. Paul did not say that God declared these unbelieving Jews unworthy of eternal life: he says that they declared themselves unworthy of it!" ¹⁵

So if it is the unbelievers' fault for rejecting eternal life, then the believers should be commended for receiving eternal life. This is why when you get into Romans 4:4-5 you will see that faith is the only non-meritorious thing a lost human being can do before a holy God. Faith is not a work. It is the one thing we can do to gain God's favor, and it is non-meritorious in the mind of God, meaning that no one can hit their stride in heaven, or strut into heaven as proud as a peacock—"Look at what I did!" That is a misunderstanding of what "believe" is in the mind of God.

God, as we know, does not accept works for justification. Isaiah 64:6 is very clear that our righteous deeds—not our unrighteous deeds—but our righteous deeds, things that we do to curry His favor, are like a filthy garment. If that is true, then what is God going to accept? He is going to accept the one non-meritorious thing that we can do as lost human beings before Him, which is to believe.

Whether a person believes or not is their decision. And if a person ends up in hell because they went through their life never trusting in the gospel, then they have no one to blame but themselves. This is a very different understanding of these things from Calvinism.

Well, should we jump from the frying pan into the fire? Let us go over to Romans 8:29-30, also under Unconditional Election, looking at verses that Calvinists used to support double predestination. These verses are called the great chain of salvation. Romans 8:29-30 says,

¹⁴ Ron Merryman, "Election & Acts 13:48," *Grace Family Journal*, September-October 2000.

¹⁵ Ron Merryman, "Election & Acts 13:48," *Grace Family Journal*, September-October 2000.

"For those whom He foreknew ['proginosko' (προγινώσκω)] He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified" (Romans 8:29-30).

Romans 8:29-30

1. Foreknowledge of God
2. Predestination of God
3. The calling of God
4. Justification before God as a result of faith alone, in Christ alone
5. Either at the Rapture or death, glorification

The Calvinistic system is going to camp here on "predestined": God choosing. Let us pretend that "predestined" is the operative word in the whole thing (I do not think it is, because "foreknew" came before "predestined"). Let us forget "foreknew" for just a second. What are we predestined for? *"To become conformed to the image of His Son"* (Romans 8:29).

It does not say that we are chosen so we will not go to hell. For years, and years, and years, I read this as "I am predestined so I will not go to hell." But that is not what Romans 8:29 says. The predestination is that I would be conformed into the image of His Son, which I would understand as glorification. I would also understand it as becoming more and more Christ-like in daily life. That is what God chose me for.

When I had my Calvinistic glasses on, I would read this and I would say to myself, "I was chosen so that I would not go to hell." (And even then, I did not know if I was one of the elect—because how do you know if you have persevered enough to demonstrate that you are one of the elect?) In reality, taking off your Calvinistic glasses de-Calvins the verse (Romans 8:29). Just read it for what it says.

It says that the choice that God makes towards us is *"to become conformed to the image of His Son"* (Romans 8:29). In other words, it is actually saying that God chose us to grow up in Him on this side of eternity, and to experience glorification with Him throughout all eternity.

Notice the word order (Romans 8:29): foreknowledge precedes predestination. So if you are a believer in the prescience view of election, as Pastor Rokser is a believer in, there is actually a biblical basis for it. Because who did God choose? *"Those whom He foreknew"* (Romans 8:29): "proginosko" [προγινώσκω].

In other words, in the prescience view, which is a legitimate view, God looked down through the corridors of time, and saw who would trust in Him and who would not. And God picked the winners. Calvinism is reversing foreknowledge and predestination. But you do not have to do that, because Paul does not reverse them. I found that very interesting.

And you are saying, "Well, come on now, does 'proginosko' [προγινώσκω] really mean that God looked down through the corridors of time and chose those on the basis of some decision He knew that they would make? Yes, "proginosko" [προγινώσκω] can be used that way.

Peter the apostle uses "proginosko" [προγινώσκω] that way in 2 Peter 3:17—"You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand ['proginosko' (προγινώσκω)],...." In other words, "proginosko" [προγινώσκω] is used to describe knowledge that Peter's audience had beforehand. That is how the prescience view uses "proginosko" [προγινώσκω] in Romans 8:29.

"Oh, ridiculous. You cannot interpret the Bible that way." Well, Peter used "proginosko" [προγινώσκω] that way. Why can Paul not be using "proginosko" [προγινώσκω] that way? "Does God really do that kind of thing? Does He look down through the corridors of time, and does He know who is going to choose Him and who is not?" Well, who is God, exactly? In Revelation 22:13, this is how Jesus describes Himself at the very end of the Bible:

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

Jesus has always been. He is the uncaused cause. He is the eternally existent second member of the Godhead. The only change in Jesus was at the point of the virgin conception, at which humanity was added to eternally existent deity and He became at that point the God-Man. He did not take off the God coat and put on the Man coat. There is no subtraction, there is no exchange. There is an addition. Other than that, Jesus is unchanging. In fact, to Jesus, tomorrow is already today. Did you know that?

That is how God in His Bible predicts the future (the field of Bible prophecy: eschatology). How can God predict the future? He is the Alpha and the Omega. He is not bound by time. If that is in fact the nature of God, the prescience understanding of Romans 8:29-30 is completely legitimate. God already knows who is going to choose Him through volition and who is going to reject Him through volition, and He picks winners. That is why "foreknew" is mentioned before "predestined" (Romans 8:29).

And even if you reject the word order, what are we predestined unto? Romans 8:29 does not say that we are chosen to heaven and some are left behind for hell with no choice. That view has to be read into the passage. The choosing of God is that we would be conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29).

So it is just a matter of taking off certain theological biases and reading the Bible yourself. If you are stuck on a desert island with the Bible and you have no Logos program, and no internet of some theologian to try to tell you what the Bible actually says, you would never come to these Calvinistic conclusions unless a Calvinist came swimming to the shore and sat you down and said, "Okay, here is how you are supposed to read this."

I hope you are enjoying this study. I am having a good time with it. We are going to get into Romans 9 next week, because it is a big deal, and then I will bring up some other issues related to this double predestination.