

OF SOVEREIGNTY AND FREE WILL:
A DISCUSSION OF THE DOCTRINE OF PREDESTINATION

THEO 525-C01 (fall 2009)

Systematic Theology I

Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary

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November 12, 2009

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INTRODUCTION

This paper will attempt to show that a modified form of semi-Pelagianism is the view of predestination that best takes into account the witness of Scripture. In order to better understand this doctrine we will look at the various historical views of predestination and attempt to see them in light of God's Word and from a Christological perspective.

It is important to understand from the outset that this doctrine is difficult to understand. John Calvin warns Christians against looking too intently into the doctrine. As he maintains in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, "The subject of predestination, which in itself is attended with considerable difficulty is rendered very perplexed and hence perilous by human curiosity, which cannot be restrained from wandering into forbidden paths and climbing to the clouds determined if it can that none of the secret things of God shall remain unexplored."¹ Millard Erickson asserts that "Of all the doctrines of the Christian faith, certainly one of the most puzzling and least understood is the doctrine of predestination."² M.G. Easton reminds us that this doctrine "belongs to the 'secret things' of God."³ However, since this principle affects so many other Christian doctrines it is important to try to come to a biblical and historical understanding of the topic.

There are two major times in history when the doctrine of Predestination came to the forefront of discussion. The first was in the late fourth century when Augustine argued against the views of Pelagius. The second was during the Reformation when Calvin's views were challenged by Arminius. There have, of course, been other perspectives throughout the centuries. One of these views that we will give limited attention to is that of Karl Barth, as it shifts the

¹ John Calvin and Henry Beveridge, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), S. III, xxi, 2.

² Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 921.

³ M. G. Easton, *Easton's Bible Dictionary* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996), c1897.

focus of the doctrine somewhat and gives an interesting alternative to the traditional views.

Although there are many verses that refer to predestination, both implicitly and explicitly, for the sake of brevity we will focus on the several that most directly refer to the discussion, and attempt to understand them in light of the entire biblical witness.

HISTORICAL VIEWS OF THE DOCTRINE OF PREDESTINATION

Augustine

Although Erickson argues that Augustine's views of predestination were based on Scripture and not on his own experience, it appears that his conversion experience and the practice of the church at the time influenced his theology immensely.⁴ For example, Bruce L. Shelley asserts that Augustine "sensed profoundly the depth of his sin and hence the greatness of God's salvation. He felt that nothing less than irresistible divine power (grace) could have saved him from his sin and only constantly flowing divine grace could keep him in the Christian life."⁵ Further, his argument for the doctrine of original sin which affected his views on predestination was based on the general practice of infant baptism in the church.⁶ This led to the presupposition that humanity is born sinful as a result of the sin Adam had committed in the garden. In Augustine's view, since we are born sinful and corrupt, we are not able to, without divine intervention, do any good. Therefore, since the power to repent and turn to God is not naturally innate in humanity, God, in his sovereignty, must choose who will be saved and who will not. It is apparent that one's view of original sin has a direct influence on one's view of predestination. Augustine's view of original sin is further placed in doubt, when one sees that he based much of

⁴ Erickson, 922.

⁵ Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 129.

⁶ William C. Placher, *A History of Christian Theology: an introduction*. (Louisville: The Westminster Press, 1983), 116.

his scriptural argument on Romans 5:12, in which the Vulgate mistranslates the phrase *eph ho*. This led to Augustine's belief that all humanity was literally "in Adam" when he sinned, and thus sinned themselves.⁷ If his foundational view of original sin is thus cast into doubt, then the doctrine of predestination that he built upon that view does not stand firmly. Basically, Augustine taught that Christ was sent into the world to die only for a select few (limited atonement) called the elect. The means by which God chooses who will be saved and who will be damned seems somewhat arbitrary, but is ultimately placed in the sovereign will of God. In Augustine's view salvation is solely an act of God and leaves no room for the free will or decision of man. It appears that Augustine's ideas of predestination, though compelling in theory, did not succeed in the experience and practice of the church. This was seen ultimately in the fact that although his views were upheld at the Council of Ephesus in 431, in general practice the church held to a semi-Pelagian view in the centuries that followed.⁸

PELAGIUS

Pelagius came to the discussion of predestination from a very different starting point than Augustine had. Pelagius was not a theologian per se, but a preacher, possibly a monk from the British Isles who came to Rome and eventually North Africa in the late fourth century with a student named Coelestius. Pelagius was a moralist who was apparently appalled by the low moral standards in Rome.⁹ Pelagius had a higher view of free will in the process of salvation and believed that "each man is created free as Adam was and that each man has the power to choose good or evil."¹⁰ In the Pelagian view Adam's sin only affected humanity in that it set a

⁷ Erickson, 653.

⁸ Ibid., 924.

⁹ Williston Walker, *The History of the Christian Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), 185.

¹⁰ Shelley, 131.

“corrupting example.”¹¹ His views were not new. On the contrary Pelagius was, for the most part, attempting to return from Augustinian teaching to the teaching of Ambrose, Origin, and Jerome, who believed “that God dispenses his grace among men according to the use which he foresees that each will make of it.”¹² Pelagius simply brought this belief to its logical conclusion and maintained that since God held man responsible for his sin then man must be able to live without sin. This view can be summed up in the phrase, “If I ought, I can.”¹³ Pelagius would say that “God helps those who help themselves;” whereas Augustine would say “God helps those who cannot help themselves.”¹⁴

Extreme or “pure” Pelagianism states that we “save (or damn) ourselves by the ‘good works’ we do (or refuse to do).”¹⁵ The problem that arises from this view is that it “denies both the love and the sovereign power of God.”¹⁶ Ultimately, the downfall of extreme Pelagianism is that it renders Christ’s death unnecessary. If we are able to save ourselves by living a sinless life, then why did Christ have to die? Augustine would have none of it and campaigned against Pelagianism. This attack led to the condemnation of Pelagianism by the Council of Ephesus in 431.¹⁷ As mentioned above, however, the church in the years following this ruling adopted a semi-Pelagian view in practice.

Semi-Pelagianism is also known as the doctrine of “synergism.” In this view God and man each has their own part in the work of salvation. Semi-Pelagianism teaches that though we are all unworthy of forgiveness and are “totally dependent on the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ for our salvation,” we are able to “acknowledge our need for God’s grace,” we are able to

¹¹ Ibid., 129.

¹² Calvin, S. III, xxii, 8.

¹³ Walker, 185.

¹⁴ Placher, 115.

¹⁵ Shirley C. Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine* (Louisville, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 126.

¹⁶ Ibid., 127.

¹⁷ Erickson, 924.

“confess Christ as Lord and Savior,” and “we can allow the transforming power of God’s Holy Spirit to come into our hearts.”¹⁸ Hence, God does His part in providing what is needed in order for all to be saved and man does his part by accepting that grace which has been offered. As we will discuss later in the paper, this view appears to best represent the biblical witness. However, many, including Calvin and Luther, believed that the idea that we can do anything in the salvific process amounts to the idea of salvation by works. The question remains, however, is it a work to accept a gift that is freely given?

Calvin

John Calvin defined predestination as “the eternal decree of God, by which he hath determined in himself what he would have to become of every individual of mankind... eternal life is foreordained for some, and eternal damnation for others. Every man, therefore, being created for one or the other of these ends, we say is predestined either to life or to death.”¹⁹ Like Augustine before him, Calvin took exception to Pelagius’ view that man can do any part in bringing about his own salvation. This view stems from other doctrines within Calvin’s theology. Calvin believed in man’s *total depravity* that leaves man completely corrupt and helpless since the fall. This view was influenced greatly by Augustine’s doctrine of original sin. Calvin taught of *limited atonement*, which states that Christ came to die not for the world, but for the elect. He maintained that God’s saving grace was *irresistible*, which is the belief that if called by God’s grace, he cannot reject it. And he believed in the *perseverance of the Saints*, which states that once saved, man cannot fall away from God’s grace. Within these tenets is the belief of *unconditional election*, which avows that “salvation and damnation rest only on God’s free

¹⁸ Guthrie, 128.

¹⁹ John McIntock and James Strong, “Calvinism,” in *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970), 2:42.

decision ‘before the foundation of the world.’”²⁰ The problem with this structure of belief is that if you believe one facet, you ultimately have to believe the whole thing. Calvin’s entire view of predestination is based on this theological “package.” Conversely, if you deny one aspect of the “TULIP” theology, you must ultimately deny the rest. Although these beliefs are based on certain scriptures, they deny or ignore other scriptures that maintain the opposite of their propositions.

In any case, Calvinism ultimately leads to a doctrine of double predestination, which states that God, from eternity, did not only ordain some to be saved but some to be damned. Guthrie suggests that “the doctrine of double predestination jumps to the conclusion that those whom we observe to be ‘insiders’ must be chosen and loved by God, whereas the ‘outsiders’ must be rejected or passed over. But is that a legitimate conclusion? Is it God or we ourselves who choose and reject in this case?”²¹ Even among Calvinists this is a touchy subject as there are differing views on the logical order of God’s decrees. *Supralapsarianism* maintains that God’s decree that some would be saved and others condemned preceded His decree to create both the elect and the reprobate. *Infralapsarianism* proposes that God’s decree to create mankind and the fall of His creation preceded His decree to save some and condemn others. *Sublapsarianism* teaches that God created man, allowed the fall then decreed to provide a salvation sufficient for all, and then decreed to choose some to receive that salvation.²²

The idea of Calvinism that we are helpless to do anything of our own will to save ourselves or others had a deep impact on the praxis of Christians, specifically in the disciplines of prayer, evangelism, and repentance. It was these deficiencies in Calvinist theology that caused Arminius to step up and challenge his ideas.

²⁰ Placher, 226.

²¹ Guthrie, 123.

²² Erickson, 931.

Arminius

Jacobus Arminius, a minister from Amsterdam who became a theology professor at Leyden, was chosen in 1589 to defend supralapsarianism against two ministers of Delft.²³ It was during his research on the questions involved in the debate that he came to take issue with the prevailing Calvinism of the time. Earlier in his pastorate he seemed to have some questions regarding the implications of Calvin's absolute predestination when "some of his parishioners would tell him that, while they wanted to stop sinning, they guessed they were not predestined to do so!"²⁴ He concluded that the doctrine, "restrains...all zeal and studious regard for good works..., extinguishes the zeal for prayer..., [and] takes away all that most salutary fear and trembling with which we are commanded to work out our own salvation."²⁵

Arminius agreed with Augustine and Calvin on the doctrine of original sin. Unlike Pelagius, Arminius believed that man had inherited Adam's sin. However, Arminius wanted to modify Calvinism in order that "God might not be considered the author of sin, nor man an automation in the hands of God."²⁶ He taught that predestination was not arbitrary on God's part, but was based on "divine foreknowledge of the use men would make of the means of grace."²⁷ He wrote, "The decree rests upon the foreknowledge of God, by which He has known from eternity which persons should believe according to such an administration of the means serving to repentance and faith through His preceding grace and which should persevere through subsequent grace, and also who should not believe and persevere."²⁸ Whereas Calvin had claimed limited atonement, Arminius declared that Christ indeed died for all, however only those

²³ Walker, 454.

²⁴ Placher, 226.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 317.

²⁷ Walker, 454.

²⁸ Carl Bangs, *Arminius* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 352.

who believe receive the benefits of His death. Whereas Calvin taught irresistible grace, Arminius held to the idea that grace may be rejected. And where Calvin believed in the preservation of the saints, Arminius contended that “God would give the saints grace so that they need not fall,” while emphasizing that the “Scriptures seemed to teach that it was possible for man to fall away from salvation.”²⁹

After Arminius’ death in 1609, his followers compiled their beliefs in the *Remonstrance*. They claimed that “since God knows everything, God knows who will accept grace and who will turn it down. In that sense salvation and damnation are predestined.”³⁰ In short, the Arminian view of predestination is not arbitrary on God’s part, but is based on His foreknowledge of man’s decision and action in response to divine grace.³¹ The Synod of Dort in 1619 condemned Arminius and his ideas and systematically laid out the five pillars of Calvinist orthodoxy.

Barth

Karl Barth comes into this discussion because he gives an interesting perspective on the doctrine of predestination. Although he was influenced by Calvin and his terminology, Barth “ascribed different meanings to the terms.”³² He further saw the “traditional Calvinistic position as a misreading of the Bible, based on a metaphysical belief that God’s relationship to the universe is static.”³³ Barth contended that God is like a king who is free to “correct, suspend, or replace his decree in such a fashion as to lead to virtual deism.”³⁴ This declares that God is sovereign in His will even within creation, not just sovereign in the means by which he set His creation in motion. “The unchanging element is not, in Barth’s view, an eternal choice of some

²⁹ Cairns, 317.

³⁰ Placher, 226.

³¹ H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1946), 2:346.

³² Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), c.1989, S. 563.

³³ Erickson, 935.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

and a rejection of others, but the constancy of God in his triune being as freely chosen love.”³⁵

Barth believed that the proper starting point for this doctrine was Christ himself. He maintains that the “older theologians” did not read the texts regarding predestination from a Christological perspective. Where Calvin saw election referring to mankind, Barth saw election as referring to Christ himself as the “elected man.” In Barth’s view “Jesus Christ is both the subject as the elector and the object as the elected.”³⁶ He further stated, while rejecting universalism, that “in Christ all individuals are elect... God, in His grace, elected Christ, and through Him man is elected and reconciled to God.”³⁷

“Barth maintains that there is an intricate connection between the fact that Christ is at the center of God’s work within time and the eternal foreordaining of that work in the divine election. If this is the case, God’s will was to elect, not reject the human beings. The incarnation is proof that God is for human beings, not against them. He has chosen them, not rejected them... In [Christ] the entire human race has been chosen.”³⁸

For Barth, all are elected, yet not all of them live as if they are elected. “Some live as if they were rejected, but this is of one’s own choosing and doing.”³⁹ This perspective changes somewhat the bad influence the doctrine of predestination has played on the discipline of evangelism. Barth challenges the “elected community” to proclaim the good news to all that they have been elected and chosen by God and thus call them to live accordingly by turning to Him. The drawback of Barth’s theology of predestination is that it once again finds its basis on the Augustinian views of original sin rather than on biblical truths. The concept of starting with Christ as the incarnate will of God in trying to understand the biblical concept of predestination,

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 2:2:457.

³⁷ Erickson, 935.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 937.

however, is very apt and we will attempt to do just that in the following section as we discuss the biblical passages that concern the doctrine.

BIBLICAL TEXTS CENTRAL TO PREDESTINATION

Erickson writes that “Thomas Aquinas drew a distinction between God’s general will that all be saved and His special will in electing some and rejecting others: ‘God wills all men to be saved by His antecedent will, which is to will not simply but relatively; and not by His consequent will, which is to will simply.’”⁴⁰ However, this distinction does not clearly present itself in the biblical witness. To capriciously imply that God’s will in one passage is different than in another is simply bad exegesis. The will of God that is presented in Scripture, especially when seen from a Christological sense is, as Paul writes to Timothy, that he “wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”⁴¹ This idea is further established by Peter who writes in 2 Peter 3:8b-9, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” The historical arguments for predestination, apart from Pelagius and possibly Barth, ignore these and many other passages of Scripture. Some scriptures do, in fact, speak of the “predestined” or the “elect.” The question is what is it that these verses are referring to? What is being “predestined”? What are the “elect” being chosen for? Augustine and Calvin would insist that these inferences are to the salvation of the individual and therefore God must have chosen them to be saved, and conversely chosen others to be condemned. In the following section we will discuss several passages and try to discover what is meant by these terms.

Old Testament Passages

⁴⁰ Erickson, 925.

⁴¹ Except when otherwise indicated, all scripture references are from the *New International Version*.

In the Old Testament scriptures God “elects” several people to specific purposes. He elected Noah to build an ark and to therefore preserved the future of humanity. He chose Abraham to be the means by which He would bless the world. In Genesis 12:3, during His calling of Abraham, God states, “I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and *all peoples on the earth will be blessed through you.*”⁴² Howard Marshall posits that by this verse and others like it the fact that “Yahweh governs human history teleologically, to bring about his own predestined purpose for human welfare.”⁴³ This theme of election for a purpose is developed throughout the Old Testament narrative. The teleological factor of God’s will is verified in such verses as Psalm 67 which proclaims that the reason for the blessings of Israel is that His “ways be known on earth,” that His “salvation among all nations,” and Isaiah 2:2-4, which attests that “all nations will stream to the mountain of the Lord” which will be established in the “last days.” In these, and many other passages it is clear that Israel’s election as God’s people was purposeful. God elected them to be the means by which salvation was offered to the rest of the world.

Scripture makes it very clear that this election was unmerited. Deuteronomy 7:7, for example reads, “The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath He swore to your forefathers that He brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh King of Egypt.” Clearly, the elect even in the Old Testament, had no right to boast about their election. But the fact that Abraham was called does not mean that he did not have to respond with action. He had to believe in God, he had to obey God and go where He would lead him in order to be

⁴² Italics added for emphasis.

⁴³ D.R.W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*. Electronic ed. Of 3rd ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), S. 951.

used for God's purposes. The election was a two way relationship. God called and Abraham heeded. Noah, in the same way, was saved not only by the fact that he was called, but in the fact that he believed God and obeyed him and built the ark. This election appears most like the synergism of semi-Pelagianism. God elects for a specific purpose and man chooses freely whether to accept that election or not. In God's sovereignty he allows us to freely choose.

This pattern of election can also be seen in the prophets who were called for God's specific purposes among his people. In most of the calling passages, the fact that the prophet will do what God is calling him to do is doubtful, and the possibility of rejection is always there. Moses, for example, tried every excuse in the book not to heed God's call at the burning bush. Isaiah and Jeremiah both felt unworthy of their calling and tried to reject God before God apparently brought them around to view things from His perspective. In both of the latter cases, God makes known that he had predestined them to do His will of bringing His word to the people of Israel and beyond its borders to the rest of the world. Isaiah 49:5-6 reads, "And now the Lord says – he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord and my God has been my strength – he says: 'It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, *that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.*'"⁴⁴ And again in Jeremiah 1:5 we read, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet *to the nations.*" In light of these passages, we see that God did indeed foreordain those he would elect, however their election was in order to bring about the salvation of all peoples not just a chosen few. These elect were called by God, but had to eventually choose to heed that call, to live up to their election. This is not to say that the power was in their reaction to God's offer.

⁴⁴ Italics added for emphasis.

However, God provided the words for Moses, he was the power for Isaiah and Jeremiah, they simply had to choose to accept God's gift and use it for His glory and for his ultimate purpose: to bring salvation to others.

New Testament Passages

In the New Testament, we must understand that we are dealing with the same God who still has the same ultimate purpose for his people, that they be "light" and "salt" to the world. That Augustine and Calvin read the New Testament and saw in it the idea of God's elect as a chosen arbitrary few is almost humorous in light of the fact that Christ is the center of that salvific work. The reason this is amusing is because Jesus, when dealing with the teachers and rulers of Israel, rejected their view of salvation as being based on their election as God's people. In Matthew 3:8-9, for example, Jesus proclaims to the Pharisees, "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham." Jesus was clear that the elect were not chosen to sit by and enjoy the benefits of the elect, but were elected in order that they might bring the truth of God to the world. Jesus himself is testament to the fact that God's will is to provide salvation for the world. John 3:16-17 tells us why Jesus had to die. It does not say that the atonement brought by Christ was limited to the elect. The passage declares that God sent him because He loved the "world" and that "*whoever* believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." In this sense, Arminius was correct in asserting that Christ's death was sufficient for all, yet efficient only for those who believed in him. The few times in scripture when atonement is spoken of in relation to the church, is in the context of a letter to the church. The church were a chosen people, but what were they chosen for? In Acts 1:8 Jesus says to his disciples, "You will be my witnesses to Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends

of the earth.” This was the purpose for which they had been chosen. The church in the same way was called to this special purpose.

The specific passages that have been difficult in the debate of predestination have been Ephesians 1 and Romans 8-9. Ephesians 1:4-10 states:

“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.”

Paul makes it apparent that the church was chosen in Christ before the creation of the world and this fact is often quoted by Calvinists and Augustinians. However, Paul also makes it clear that this choice by God was for a specific purpose: “to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.” It is for this purpose the church is called, it is for this purpose the church has been given “the mystery of his will.” We are indeed elect, but the elect were not chosen to be saved from before creation, according to this verse. The elect were chosen to bring the salvation available in Christ to the rest of creation.

Romans 8:28-30 reads:

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”

Here again is the wording that often elates Calvinists. However, the question again must be asked: To what purpose were they called? The passage talks about His purpose. That God foreknew who would be fulfilling His purposes is no surprise. Just as God knew Isaiah and

Jeremiah would serve his purposes when they were still in the womb, He knows who will be called to do His will in all times. This however, is not to say that he destined some to be saved and some to be lost. This verse does not even hint at such a conclusion. What it does state is that he “predestined” these men and women of the church “to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” In other words, God predestined that those who would be saved would have to turn toward Christ in repentance in order that others might be influenced to do the same. But Paul also states the good news here that we are not on our own in this process. It is by God’s power that we are able to fulfill His will in the world, for though we were chosen for a difficult purpose, by Him we are justified and glorified.

It is clear that when seen from the context of God’s purpose in electing some to save all, that the idea of predestination in the Calvinistic and Augustinian sense is almost foreign to the scriptural witness. Just as the deacons of Acts 7 were elected for a specific purpose within the church, those throughout scripture who are referred to as elected are elected in order to help in bringing about God’s ultimate purpose: that all may come to repentance. This is not to say that the scriptures speak of universalism, which claims that all will be saved in spite of what they do, because it is God’s will. What it does mean is that God has done all that is necessary for all to be saved, except one thing: He has not made the choice for us. The image that helps me to understand this synergy is that God has created a bath, he created water, he created soap, all that we need to be clean, and then he tells us “be clean.” He has done all the work, but in order for us to be clean we must still get into the bath. This is not works righteousness; it is the proper response in understanding the gift of grace God has provided for us.

CONCLUSION

The semi-Pelagian view of synergy tends to make the most sense in light of the scriptures we have viewed from a Christological perspective. God has in his divine foreknowledge, supplied all that is needed in order for any to receive salvation. This unmerited gift is found in his revelation of Himself in scripture, His election of a small group to bring about the salvation of a larger group as seen in Israel in the Old Testament and the Church in the New Testament, and ultimately this grace is seen in the blood of Christ that was necessary for the forgiveness of sin. God provided the bath, so to speak, and called all men to “be clean.” As with all the callings and elections of God in Scripture, there is a response on our parts. If God was to force us to be in a relationship with him, than that would not be a real relationship. Through His sovereignty, God gives us free-will that we might respond freely to His calling.

The biblical image that best sums up this view is the comparison Jesus made of himself to the brazen snake that Moses lifted up in the wilderness. In John 3:14-15 he says to Nicodemus, “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the son of man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.” Later in John 12:32 Jesus said, “But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” When Moses raised up the bronze snake as God had told him to in Numbers 21, he was raising up the means of Israel’s salvation. The scriptures teach, however, that only those who chose to obey God’s command and to look at the snake were indeed saved. In the same way, when Christ was raised up on the cross, it was God’s providence of our salvation. It is, however, only when we choose to rely on him as our salvation that that salvation becomes effective. The synergy is apparent in that God has done all that is needed, He has predestined that salvation would be available, but we must choose to respond freely to that offer. Further, as the elect we are to remember the purpose for

which we are chosen. We must in turn raise up Christ so that all men may be drawn to him and have eternal life.

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