

THE EQUITY OF GOD IN HIS DEALINGS WITH MANKIND

A Thesis

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THESIS STATEMENT

God is equitable in His dealings with all mankind, and the characteristic of divine equity can be ascertained by virtue of the general revelation of moral continuity amongst cultures and His special revelation in scripture.

The purpose of this thesis will be to consider the subject of divine equity and its relationship to the eternal state of mankind. The assertion is that the evidence of scripture and moral continuity amongst cultures will reveal that God is not only righteous and just, but His own self-disclosure concerning justice mandates His equity in the judicial proceedings with mankind. It is believed that this research will show that equity is an aspect of His essential character and should not merely be subsumed under the heading of His justice.

I. Moral Continuity: A Sign of God's Equity

The idea of moral absolutes has fallen on hard times in our postmodern society today, and those who disdain the thought as one bound strictly to religion increase in numbers.¹ D.A. Carson notes, “The thought that one particular religious figure and one religious perspective can be universally valid, normative, and binding upon all peoples in all cultures . . . is widely rejected today as arrogant and intellectually untenable in our pluralistic world.² In our pluralistic world, few can agree on a binding set of moral laws that all are obliged to uphold and, as Dallas Willard concludes, “The centuries-long attempt to devise a morality from within merely human resources has now proven itself a failure.”³

Yet, does this mean that there is no basis underlying the varying social and individual mores we unwittingly adhere to?⁴ C.S. Lewis argued convincingly for a “Law of Human Nature, Moral Law, or Rule of Decent Behavior” stating that there is a

¹ George Barna in *Futurecast: What Today's Trends Mean for Tomorrow's World* (Austin, TX.: Fedd and Co. Inc.), pp. 66-70, 138 notes that while the percentage of American adults that possess a biblical world view has remained relatively stable over the course of the last two decades (9%), the culture itself has shifted away from moral absolutes and to individualized truth. This shift has fostered a growing sense of distrust in the decisions and leadership of both individuals and government leaders.

² D.A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 495.

³ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (New York: HarperCollins: 1998), 131.

⁴ Gerd Theissen argues the relevance for religious commandments and the concord they have with preset internal norms in *A Critical Faith: A Case for Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 56-59. He asserts that there is a presupposed resonance or absurdity regarding what is and what ought to be and religious convictions merely resonate or contradict such thoughts, feelings and realities. He states, “Reality experienced in a religious way motivates us in accordance with the principles which motivate human behavior in other respects” and “religious commandments merely resonate with provisionally determined expectations, motives and concerns.”

relational rule of fair play (decent behavior or morality) that men unwittingly appeal to and “expect the other man to know.”⁵ Lewis’ conclusion is that “human beings all over the earth have this curious idea that they ought to behave in a certain way, and cannot really get rid of it. Secondly, that they do not in fact behave in that way.”⁶ He views this innate aspect of the human persona as more than mere instinct but, rather, that which directs our instincts. Neither is this element of humanity merely the product of education (a social convention) but is rather independent of societal mores and truly measures what is right.⁷ The idea of a normative moral “ought” or the desire for fair treatment finds no basis in the naturalistic viewpoint according to author J.P. Moreland. Moreland emphasizes that the naturalist’s frustration and desire for justice over an injustice argues against their philosophical belief and must ultimately be considered baseless, for what is hurtful to one may well be considered good for the other. Also, to the naturalist, there would be no such thing as the deeper motives of sacrificial duty for purposes that are not self-gratifying are futile and irrational. Yet, history is replete with examples of such behavior.⁸

Philosophically, “man needs absolutes if our existence is to have meaning—my existence, your existence, Man’s existence,” argues Francis Schaeffer. “There must be an absolute if there are to be morals, and there must be an absolute if there are to be real values. If there is no absolute beyond man’s ideas, then there is no final appeal to judge

⁵ C.S. Lewis, *The Case for Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co.: 1977), 3-4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷ C.S. Lewis, *The Case for Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co.: 1977), 10-11.

⁸ J.P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City: A Defense of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 119, 128.

between individuals and groups whose moral judgments conflict.”⁹ The appeal to the (divine) cause-effect argument can also be seen in the deeper personal and emotional aspects of humanity. Author, J. Budziszewski considers human love to be only reasonable in light of divine love itself, asserting “human love means so much, because divine love means still more.”¹⁰ Yet, understanding the distance between the divine cause and the human effect can be important for a proper relationship to our moral foundation. As Norman Geisler elucidates concerning a human’s relationship to his divine Creator, “We are similar to God—the same but in a different way. Existence, goodness, love, all mean the same thing for both us and for God. We have them in a limited way, and He is unlimited.”¹¹ Our God is perfect in the application of His nature to the circumstance of mankind; we are clouded by the temporal and circumstantial. He is omniscient and directs all His activities toward His good purpose; we are finite and dependent upon reason, faith, and experience.¹²

⁹ Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Old Tappan: Revell, 1976), 145.

¹⁰ J. Budziszewski, *On the Meaning of Sex* (Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2012), 139-141.

¹¹ Norman L. Geisler and Ronald M. Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1990), 23.

¹² This becomes important when it is argued that Christian morality has been guilty of false reasoning and improper implementation at various times throughout history. Historical examples of this would be the justification of slavery or the religious justification of the abuses of colonialism. In modern times, Obery M. Hendricks Jr. in *The Politics of Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 263, appeals to the distinction between conservative moral values and political conservatism stating, “A major defining feature of political conservatism in every historical era has been its unerring dedication to maintaining and conserving wealth, power, and authority in the hands of those who already possess it—that is, the rich elites who dominate their societies.” He concludes by asserting, “Therefore, as a political doctrine, conservatism is the ideological means by which rich elites justify the privileged existence they enjoy at the expense of their poorer countrymen” (264).

The Bible accounts all fallen humans as being under the just condemnation of God (Rom. 3.9, 23). It also speaks of the innate presence of God's moral testimony in the heart of all human beings (Rom. 1.18-21; Ps. 19.1-7; Acts 17.24-28).¹³ Though distorted and perverted through human reason and its fallen nature, this moral inclination is a means of equitable conviction all mankind must acknowledge (whether consciously or not). It is the standard that underlies the means by which those in unbelief conduct their affairs with one another and justify their cause (Rom. 2.14-15). With this said, might this moral code also be the means by which an equitable God predisposes the heart of the unbeliever to the gospel? Could it be for the Gentile nations the means by which our God brings unbelievers to a disposition that is open to the gospel of Christ under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, and leaves those who reject its influence in just condemnation (John 16.8-11; Rom. 5.12-21)?¹⁴

¹³ Bruce A. Demarest includes moral consciousness with the general revelation of God. He defines general revelation as "That divine disclosure to all persons at all times and place by which one comes to know that God is, and what he is like. While not imparting saving truths such as the Trinity, incarnation, or atonement, general revelation mediates the conviction that God exists and that he is self-sufficient, transcendent, immanent, eternal, powerful, wise, good, and righteous. General or natural revelation may be divided into two categories: (1) internal, the innate sense of deity and conscience, and (2) external, nature and providential history." Quoted from Walter A. Elwell, ed., "General Revelation," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), by Bruce A. Demarest.

¹⁴ John speaks of the Comforter "Convicting the world" and, while our Lord is describing this ministry as post resurrection, it does not discount the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit during other periods (cf. Gen. 6.3; Ps. 95.8-11). That death reigned from Adam to Moses in our Romans text is coherent with this ministry of the Holy Spirit prior to the appearance of the Mosaic Law.

II. Equity, Biblical and Linguistic Perspective

A. The Old Testament Concept

The two words used in the Old Testament for the concept of equity are מִישָׁרִים *'mesharim,'* and מִישׁוֹר *'mishor.'* The translation of these words range from 'level place' to 'uprightness (in government),' 'justice' or 'lawfully.'¹⁵ As we will see, in certain contexts, the words embrace the concept of levelness or equity in the judicial realm in both a legal and personal setting and that the terms are not really synonymous with righteousness (*sedeq*), with good (*tôb*), or with judgment (*mishpat*) though often used in parallel with them.¹⁶ Hannes Olivier further illuminates the meaning of *mishor* asserting that it represents the way in which "Yahweh will lead the innocent in order to see that justice is done to them. The term also is used to "epitomize the power, stability, and the standard by which the people will be judged and the equity that will characterize the judgment of the Messianic kingdom (Ps. 26.12; 67.4[5]; Isa. 11.4)."¹⁷ This aspect of "impartial judgment" or equity also extends out beyond Yahweh's care for His covenant people to the wicked "who have disturbed and denounced the fixed world order."¹⁸

¹⁵ R. Laird Harris, ed., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, מִ, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 417-418

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 418.

¹⁷ Willem A. VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, vol. 2, מִ, by Hannes Olivier (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 567.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 568.

1. References to Personal Equity

Proverbs 1:1-3

1 THE proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:

*2 To know wisdom and instruction,
To discern the sayings of understanding,
3 To receive instruction in wise behavior,
Righteousness, justice and equity;*

Proverb 2:6-9

*6 For the LORD gives wisdom;
From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.
7 He stores up sound wisdom for the upright;
He is a shield to those who walk in integrity,
8 Guarding the paths of justice,
And He preserves the way of His godly ones.
9 Then you will discern righteousness and justice
And equity and every good course (cf. 8:6).*

In the texts noted above, it is clear that equity is considered to be an outcome of wisdom gained through the instruction of the Word in a young man's life. In both texts, righteousness, justice and equity (*mesarim*) are considered to be uniquely distinct items. Equity is not relegated to a position of being merely an aspect of justice. Rather, it is presented as one of the important elements of wise living and of a person's nature that indicates godliness (cf. Pr. 23.16; Isa. 26.7; 33.15).

2. Divine-Judicial References

Psalm 9.7-8

*7 But the LORD abides forever;
He has established His throne for judgment,
8 And He will judge the world in righteousness;
He will execute judgment for the peoples with equity.*

Psalm 96:10

*10 Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns;
Indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved;
He will judge the peoples with equity." (cf. 98.9; 99.4).*

In the revelation and institution of the judicial system of God, equity is an intricate part. He will execute judgment upon the world and Israel equitably. This

concept, in and of itself, is one that was unknown to previous cultures, which labored under the oppression of kingly ownership. Christopher J.H. Wright notes the distinction between a human landowning king and that of the theocratic system divinely established in Israel stating, “Under a human landowning king, people live in the equality of oppression. Under their landowning God, Israel lives in equality of freedom. This equality of the redeemed is carried out in Leviticus 25 . . . the Israelites didn’t own the land, couldn’t do with it what they wanted, nor take the land of another (Jubilee returns to another, that which was their families).”¹⁹

During the Millenium, this characteristic of equitable justice will also be evident with Christ’s reign (Isa. 11.1-4). Equitable justice will be the very emblem of authority for His kingdom, and what all will come to expect.²⁰

3. Evidence of Equity as a Part of the Judicial System of Israel

As previously stated, the characteristic of equity is found in both personal and divine references. Equity was also to be an integral part of the Jewish legal code. God commanded that the judges of Israel would not show favoritism under any circumstances.

¹⁹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 94-95.

²⁰ The verses below show that the concept of equity is to be found in the millennial reign of the Messiah also:

Psalm 45:6

6 Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever;

A scepter of uprightness (mishor) is the scepter of Thy kingdom.

Isaiah 11:3-4

3 And He will delight in the fear of the LORD,

And He will not judge by what His eyes see,

Nor make a decision by what His ears hear;

4 But with righteousness He will judge the poor,

And decide with fairness (mishor) the afflicted of the earth;

And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,

And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked.

Again, Wright notes, “Rigorous fairness and the warning against bribery and favoritism covered the witnesses, parties in the legal procedure, and the judges.”²¹ The Israelites were to be fair in their treatment of all. The psalmist asks, “Do you indeed speak righteousness, O gods? Do you judge uprightly (*mesarim*), O sons of men?” Partiality was denounced in the Old Testament jurisprudence. A judge was to be completely fair in his assessment of the information presented to him, regardless of the social stature of the party in question (Deu. 1.17).²² Judicial equity was a foundation upon which the whole of the judicial system rested and when the judges could not decide an issue; God Himself would decide the matter (Deu. 10.17-19; 1.17b). Equitable jurisprudence was considered to be of such importance that God conditioned Israel’s tenure in the land upon it (Deu. 16.18-20).

B. Equity as a New Testament Concept

The New Testament concept of equity finds its roots firmly embedded in the Old Testament legal code. The Lord openly referred to this code as a basis for proper judgment and displayed an equitable attitude throughout His ministry (Jn. 7.21-24; 8.15). From His dealings with the sick and needy on the Sabbath, to His ministry to those who

²¹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 303-304.

²² Though the social structure of Israel was that of a social hierarchy, the equality and dignity of all human beings (whether rich or poor) was embedded in the judicial and ethical attitude of the Old Testament. The treatment of those less fortunate was considered to be a direct reflection of one’s attitude toward God Himself (cf. Ps. 41.1-3; Pr. 14.31; 19.17; 31.8-9 among many others). Wright notes in *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 172-174 that the Law “insisted that poverty must be addressed, that the Israelite society was a kinship and family, a welfare system be established for the distressed, and judicial equity be established for the poor.”

untrue, complement to the Lord (Lu. 20.21). The latter clause is used as a condemnation of the leadership of Israel, “to judge on the basis of appearance...to pay attention to a person’s status, to judge on the basis of reputation.”²⁸ Other than these references, the Apostle Paul exhorts masters to grant justice with fairness to their servants (Col. 4:1).²⁹

Equity is a concept that the Lord Himself communicated to the early Church (Acts 10.28, 34-35). We find that it runs throughout the writings of the New Testament, being established by the authors as one of the primary teachings of the doctrine of grace. It was to be understood that in the ministry of grace there was to be no distinction between Jew and Greek (Rom. 2.11), rich or poor (James 2.1), or slave and free (Eph. 6.9; Col. 3.25). The very act of showing favoritism was considered to be a sin against God, and an expression of evil (James 2.4).

C. Conclusion

In reviewing the topic of equity and its related words, we have seen that it is a concept that is uniquely tied to both Israel’s and the Church’s jurisprudence. It was one of many key measurements that the Lord gave us for evaluating the spiritual likeness of a person or group to Himself.³⁰ Equity or impartiality, as expressed by the Lord and

²⁷ Thoralf Gilbrant, ed., *The Complete Biblical Library: Greek-English Dictionary, Pi-Rho* (Chicago: R.R. Donnelley and Sons, 1996), 335.

²⁸ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed. vol. 1 (New York: United Bible Society, 1989), 365.

²⁹ Once in Paul’s epistle to the Romans, the idea of inequity is brought up conceptually with regard to God’s predetermined plan for Jacob (Rom. 9.14).²⁹ Here, Paul is addressing the argument that could be logically leveled against God with regard to His act of choosing Jacob and not Esau. This is a section in the letter to the Romans that has caused much confusion throughout Church history and demands a more thorough discussion (cf. Appendix: A Few Troublesome Texts).

³⁰ David P. Gushee in *The Sacredness of Human Life: Why an Ancient Biblical Vision is Key to the World’s Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 123-130 lists

subsequently by His followers, was both a crucial ingredient of the Lord's grace message and a vital display of His love amidst His church.

unique elements of the early church that influenced its growth and popularity. A number of these elements relate to the early church's respect for the sacredness of human life (i.e. Its view of infanticide and abortion, capital punishment, non-violence, etc.). Within the church community, the ideal of impartiality in a hierarchical culture stood out and appealed to the many "who were resentful of status hierarchy" (130).

III. Possible Relevance

A. Equity and High Calvinism

That God is just is indisputable biblically. Righteousness (*the moral purity of His holiness*) and justice (*His judicial action with regard to His righteousness*) is the foundation of His very government (Deu. 32.4; Ps. 89.14; 97.2).³¹ Therefore, everything that appears before the throne of God must be compatible with His holiness or “right” and, if not, be subject to the scrutiny of God’s justice. It is this elemental truth that makes the crucifixion of Christ so starkly realistic. He became sin, and bore in our stead the just condemnation of God for our offense (II Cor. 5.21, I Pet. 2.24). The result of this transaction is that we, by faith, become the just recipients of His righteous endeavor (Rom. 3.24-26). It is within the realm of this relationship that we have life and fellowship in Christ (Rom. 5.1-2; 8.1-11).

Is this event relevant to all mankind? The traditional five-point Calvinist must say “no” because of his/her belief in the limited atonement of Christ, unconditional election, and emphasis on the sovereignty (transcendence, holiness) of God. God chose based upon His own merciful and gracious plan that some would be the recipients of this truth, while others are left to their ‘just’ condemnation.³² It is ‘just’ because they have

³¹ Millard J. Erickson defines God’s righteousness as a dimension of “God’s moral purity” applied to His relationships to other beings and His justice as God “administering His kingdom in accordance with His personal righteousness” in *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 100.

³² Bruce A. Ware recognizes that while there are certain gracious acts of the Holy Spirit that are resistible (such as grieving or quenching the Holy Spirit [Eph, 4.30; I Thes. 5.19]), the effectual call of those whom God has chosen is irresistible. “Such is the grace by which we are saved. May all honor and glory be given to God alone for such a wonderful salvation!” Thomas R. Schreiner & Bruce A. Ware, eds., *Still Sovereign*:

chosen to sin and rebel against God, and would not have come to God if they could (although they can't because God didn't choose them).³³

The Arminian at this point cries foul, believing that the person surely must have some part in this eternal decision.³⁴ Roger Olson maintains, “Many, perhaps most, critics of Calvinism register extreme dismay at its divine determinism. There are many reasons, but the first and foremost one is that it renders God morally impure if not repugnant.”³⁵ To remove this decision from the court of man at best would be unfair if not sheer despotism.

Does the equity of God have a relevant place in the above positions? Truly, it does. If God manifests His very nature as that of righteous, just, *and equitable*, as

Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 211.

³³ David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls in *Good God: The Theistic Foundation of Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 69-72, give five compelling flaws with the logic of declaring that there is no incompatibility in affirming both total determinism and genuine freedom. These five philosophical objections are listed as: 1. Obligation objection: Moral duties make little sense in a fully determined to will and act system. 2. Culpability objection: Responsibility for sin that cannot be resisted is void of moral sense. 3. Bad God objection: He is a bad God because He could have saved everyone but chose not to do so. 4. Love objection: Love relationships are by nature two-way relationships. Love requires volition, not imposition. 5. Virtue objection: Morality is developed by decisions. Calvinism deprives us of the opportunity to develop character, rather character is predetermined and assigned.

³⁴ It is necessary to note that not all of the reformation era fell to the extremes of the Calvinist and Arminian positions. Bruce Demarest in *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1997), 208, clarifies, “Mediating between these two viewpoints is the Lutheran view that insists that the dual position of universal grace (*universalis gratia*) and “by grace alone” (*sola gratia*) must stand together and not be compromised by rationalistic argumentation. It accepts the paradoxical relationship between the monergism of Calvinism and synergism of Arminianism. This view juxtaposes resistible grace and a resistible call with a grace and call that is irresistible and effectual. It considers the understanding of the two's correlation as a spiritual mystery, to be understood only in eternity.”

³⁵ Roger E. Olson in *Against Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 85.

evidenced in the first of this thesis, then *each* of these traits must also be equally relevant to the salvation of humanity. Each must be satisfied in the divine plan to display the love of God in the sending, sacrificing, and resurrecting of His Only Begotten Son.

B. Equity and Inclusivism

Does the assertion that God is equitable in all His dealings with mankind infer that all religions must therefore equally lead to God? In the book, *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, Clark Pinnock expounded his view of God's salvific plan with regard to religious pluralism. Pinnock clearly had a deep love for the lost multitudes throughout the world and, in his own mind, tried to reconcile the equity of God's love with His justice in relationship to their salvation.³⁶ Being an Arminian, Pinnock's argument naturally found its source in his theology and the associated belief that the prevenient grace of God is uniquely involved in the preparation of human hearts for the gospel. Carrying this premise out logically, he asserted that the good of other world religions could be the means of "gracing people's lives and that it is one way of evoking faith and communicating grace."³⁷ Pinnock viewed Melchizedek (Gen. 14) and Cornelius (Acts 10) as Old and New Testament examples of this point, each testifying to God's influence over an individual heart by means of this grace. For Pinnock, both general and specific revelation was to be considered redemptive in nature. God, he concluded, never leaves Himself without a witness (Acts 14.17). Pinnock called upon

³⁶ Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips, eds., *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 97. Pinnock specifically took note of "the reluctance of Western theology to acknowledge that grace operates outside the church, and the abhorrent notion of a secret election to salvation of a specific number of sinners, not of people at large."

³⁷ Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips, eds., *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 100.

Western theology (with emphasis on Calvinistic and Dispensational theology), which allows no other means for salvation than through the Christ's gospel, to consider that perhaps their message was outdated in a shrinking world.³⁸ It also should be noted that Pinnock did not assert that other religions were salvific of themselves. Rather, they were "paths that lead to God and end at Jesus. Everyone must eventually pass through Jesus to reach the Father," though he was not at all explicit as to how this might ultimately manifest itself.^{39, 40}

³⁸ Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips, eds., *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 109.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁴⁰ While the thought that other religions may be the means by which God enlightens the heart of an unbeliever, it is not the testimony of the Bible. On the contrary, the Bible appears to approach the pagan religions of the Apostles' day as both futile and destructive. In his assessment of man's religious aspirations, Paul states that this worship, when combined with the depravity of man, always progresses into perversion and ungodly behavior (Rom. 1.18-32; Eph. 4.17-19). Also, at least one of the heresies of the first century was the attempt to combine the mystery religions of the Greeks with the Gospel. This was a tendency that both the Apostles Paul and John considered to be an abandoning of the faith (Gal. 4.8-11; Col. 2.8, 16-23; Rev. 2.20-24).

The Old Testament is equally as unequivocal concerning the worship of other cultures. The Israelites were exhorted not to have anything to do with the idolatrous worship of the nations (Ex. 23.32-33; 34.12-16). A vivid illustration of God's attitude toward this occurs in Numbers 25.1-9, where God actually kills twenty-four thousand Israelites who sought to combine the worship of the Lord with the gods of the Moabites. Underlying this stern attitude toward the worship of other nations, we see that God considers these religious systems, regardless of how innocent they may appear, to revolve around demons (Ps. 106.37; cf. I Cor. 10.19-21).

With this in mind, it is not irrational for us to consider the acknowledging of some value in the worship of other nations or cultures would be contrary to a biblical view of such things. Do we condemn those who worship, no! Do we acknowledge their devotion and sincerity, yes! But the recognition of their works does not justify their efforts. It merely validates them objectively, as human effort (even though they may be extraordinary religious efforts). To do as Pinnock has proposed, recognizing some of these religious efforts as a gracious means used by God to draw people to Him, is dangerous at best. If these religious deeds are divinely good and gracious, then one must ask "why not incorporate them into our own worship?" Rather, we consider the value of other forms of worship as serving to further frustrate and condemn the unbeliever. These false systems for producing a form of religious righteousness, also contribute to an ever-

While Pinnock opens a liberal door for the entrance of those not evangelized, is there still some merit for his argument? Certainly, as we have concluded, God does not use pagan religious systems to reveal His grace (cf. note 40). Rather, they fall into the same category as those living under the Mosaic Law or conscience, which justly condemns a person and reveals his need for the grace of God. Yet, the character of God cries out for a righteous, just, and *equitable* answer to the question of those who have not been evangelized. Are they merely the non-elect, as the strict Calvinist believes, destined by God to eternal damnation with no recourse? Or perhaps, God is both sovereign and equitable, and man is both responsible for his destiny and free to believe. Perhaps, He who searches the heart has provided some other way of evaluating the masses that may not have the chance of hearing the Gospel. Perhaps, man is responsible for the light that is shown to him. It is a mystery, one that lies in the bosom of God, and is only faintly illuminated by scripture.⁴¹ Whether God uses nature (Rom. 1:18; Ps. 19:1-4; Acts 14:15-

abiding sense of condemnation, guilt and wrath (Eph. 2:1-3). It is this guilt and lack of peace that causes one to grope for the divine answer to their dilemma (Acts 17:26-27). Therefore, while Pinnock attempted to reconcile his Arminian view of prevenient grace with the work of God through other religions, he did so at great risk and with little biblical foundation.

⁴¹ It appears to this writer that we, as believers, are being asked to accept one of two antinomies. An antinomy, as defined by Charles C. Ryrie in *Basic Theology* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1999), 49, is “a contradiction between two apparently equally valid principles or between inferences correctly drawn from such principles.”

The antinomy that is under scrutiny by the High Calvinist is the one that relates to the sovereignty of God and free will of man. For their part, it is of vital importance that they uphold the sovereignty of God, even if it diminishes the biblical evidence regarding the free will of man. There is no room for synergism in the salvation of man. To do so would be to subjugate God to the will of man.

The second antinomy that must be considered is that of the equity of God and human responsibility. While the High Calvinist would rightly contend that those who are condemned to Hell are justly condemned, they must do philosophical gymnastics to explain the equity of the program. That the very God who instituted a non-partiality law

17; 17.24-28), or the conscience (Rom. 2.14-16) is unclear at best, but what certainly is apparent is the fact that the conviction of the Holy Spirit is worldwide in its influence (Jn. 16.8-11).

C. A Possible Mediation between High Calvinism and Inclusivism

If the ability to believe is an element of salvation that must engendered by God in the heart of a person before they can be saved, then we can rightly conclude that God truly does save only those whom He predestined to election. Obviously, He must engender the ability to believe before one could be saved and the scriptures are conclusive concerning the fact that many will not believe. To this end those who espouse a strict Calvinistic belief would quote the verses that relate to the inability of a person to believe or come to Jesus (for example: Jn. 6.37, 44; Acts 13.48; Rom. 9.6-23). Compared to this, are the many verses that relate to the Gospel being preached to all men, confronting them with the truth and holding them accountable for their unbelief (for example: Jn. 3.16-18; 20.31; Acts 10.43; 16.31; 17.13; Rev. 22.17). Those who believe in varying degrees of personal responsibility toward the Gospel would stress these verses, for example Lewis Sperry Chafer discusses Revelation 22:17 and the word 'whosoever' saying, "the word whosoever is used at least 110 times in the New Testament, and always

in the judicial system of Israel and His church could seemingly show partiality in choosing His elect is scandalous at best.

It is with these two antinomies in mind that we conclude that it is best to leave the secret things of God with Himself (Deu. 29.29). Apparently, the finite mind of man is incapable of attaining to such thinking; these thoughts are indeed too high for us (Ps. 131.1). To this writer, biblically, it appears that both the sovereignty and equity of God are complimentary to the concepts of personal faith and responsibility. How? To answer this question would at best be speculation. But all the above elements receive sufficient support in the Word of God, and this, then, demands that we live at peace with this truth.

with the unrestricted meaning.”⁴² In other words, it cannot mean (in Chafer’s opinion) “whosoever I (God) will to will may come,” as a Calvinist is forced to interpret it.

Is faith a meritorious work? Again Chafer states that only one passage is necessary to answer the question, Romans 4:5.⁴³ Here, it is written, “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” Chafer’s point in this text is that the believer does not commit works in believing, rather, he turns from his works and trusts in “Another” to do what human works could never do.⁴⁴ The New Testament consistently contrasts faith to works, revealing that it is either faith or works. Faith, then, is the admission that we cannot work for salvation but must receive it by pure grace.⁴⁵ It is the act of receiving the gift. As to the exercise of receiving the gift, Arminius asks the questions: “A rich man bestows, on a poor and famished beggar, alms by which he may be able to maintain himself and his family. Does it cease to be a pure gift, because the beggar extends his hand to receive it? Can it be said with propriety, that ‘the alms depend partly on the liberality of the Donor, and partly on the liberty of the Receiver, though the latter would not have possessed the alms unless he had received it by stretching out his hand?’” He continued: “If these assertions cannot be truly made about a beggar who receives alms, how much less can

⁴² Lewis Sperry Chafer, “For Whom Did Christ Die?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137, no. 548 (1980): 324.

⁴³ Cf. also Rom. 3.28; Gal. 2.16; 3.2.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 321.

⁴⁵ Norman L. Geisler, *Chosen But Free* (Minneapolis: Bethany Press International, 1999), 190.

they be made about the gift of faith, for the receiving of which far more acts of Divine Grace are required!”⁴⁶

Also addressing the paradox of the sovereignty of God and man’s responsibility to believe, D. A. Carson states “Christians are not fatalists. The central line of Christian tradition neither sacrifices the utter sovereignty of God nor reduces the responsibility of his image-bearers. In the realm of philosophical theology, this position is sometimes called *compatibilism*. It simply means that God’s unconditioned sovereignty and the responsibility of human beings are mutually compatible. It does not claim to show *how* they are compatible. It claims only that we can get far enough in the evidence and the arguments to show how they are not necessarily incompatible . . .”⁴⁷ Carson sees compatibilism as a necessary component to any mature and orthodox view of God and the world.⁴⁸

In conclusion, if faith is a work, then God has truly elected some to salvation and others to condemnation. But, if it is a non-meritorious system of perception, whereby anyone could receive the gift provided for all at Calvary, then all are equally accountable for the benefits received or the punishment rendered. It is the latter view that appears to be most consistent with the biblical testimony to this writer.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Geisler quotes from James Arminius, *The Works of Arminius*, trans. James Nichols and W. R. Bagnall, vol. 1 (Auburn; Buffalo: Derby, Miller and Orton, 1853), 365–366 in *Chosen But Free* (Minneapolis: Bethany Press International, 1999), 191.

⁴⁷ D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2000), 51-52.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴⁹ Note: this position does not discount, but rather is dependent upon, God’s equitable conviction of all mankind (John 16.8-11; Acts 17.30; I Tim. 2.1-4).

IV. Appendix: A Few Troublesome Texts

John 6.37, 44, 61-66

In each of the verses listed above, it is important to note the context that there is a group of people being confronted by the Lord and His message. These are people who had followed the Lord for mere signs (6.26-27). They did not have a saving relationship with Him and were only seeking more signs (6.28-31). The whole of this discourse is directed toward these people for the purpose of convicting them of their lack of faith in Christ. It is in the context of their refusal and unbelief that these statements are made. Nowhere in the text does it appear that the Lord believed it was unnecessary to proclaim the truth to them; to the contrary, the statement appears to be part of His convicting message toward them. Similarly, the context does not state that the present unbelief of the hearers is an irrevocable state, or that the Lord believed it to be so. Would it be irrational to believe that these statements are part of a rhetorical device used by the Lord to convict the hearers of their unbelief (cf. Mt. 13.11-16)? If not, why would He quote verses referring to the hardness of the heart and dullness of the ears to the audience when their unbelief was not only known to Him, but also part of His decree?

It is important to note that on the other side of this argument those who adhere to a High Calvinistic viewpoint say consider these verses to be obvious affirmations of the doctrine of election as they view it.⁵⁰ Along with these three references they would add six other references in John's Gospel (5.21; 6.70; 8.47; 10.26-28, 29; 12.32). While it is true that these verses standing alone appear to argue for their cause, contextual study of

⁵⁰ Thomas R. Schreiner, "Does Romans 9 Teach Individual Election unto Salvation?" *Still Sovereign* (Grand Rapids: Baker, Books: 2000), 50-51.

them would be far less persuasive and lean more in the direction of the argument above. For example, Yarbrough notes that salvation is referred to in the first person singular form of the verb □□□□□□□□ or “I give,” more than forty times in John’s Gospel.⁵¹ While this is true, it must also be noted that the verb □□□□□□□□ (to believe) is used one hundred times with over ninety percent of these references relating to the subject being confronted with a decision concerning a truth object.⁵² All of the verses quoted above as referring to unconditional election have this verb embedded in the pericopes. Stressing one side of this argument and ignoring the other would appear to be an improper hermeneutic with which to approach John’s Gospel.

Romans 9:6-23.

While whole volumes have been written on this text, our point in this article is to see if this text does in fact state that mankind has no choice in his eternal destiny. Speaking to the issue of predestination in this text, J.D.G. Dunn states, “The point of this text is not to dictate a doctrine of predestination but to undermine Israel’s own doctrine of predestination. It is Jewish confidence that Gentiles are by definition “non-Israel” which Paul seeks to challenge.”⁵³ Two examples are presented in this text, Esau and Pharaoh.

⁵¹ Robert W. Yarbrough, “Divine Election in the Gospel of John,” *Still Sovereign* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 52.

⁵² Wilber F. Gingrich, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, eds. *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 660-661. Bauer defines the verb to mean believe in something, be convinced of something, with that which one believes in added . . . faith in the Divinity that lays special emphasis on trust in his power and his nearness to help, in addition to being convinced that he exists and that his revelation or disclosures are true. In our literature God and Christ is the object of this faith (660-661).”

⁵³ J.D.G. Dunn, “Letter to the Romans,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 848.

Both stand out as stark figures in the history of the nation of Israel. Both could appear to be clear examples of the call and selection of God apart from human choice.

First, we are presented with Esau, the one that God rejected prior to his birth. Jacob was loved; Esau was hated (an anthropomorphism referring to God's rejection of Esau, not His hatred of him).⁵⁴ The question that must be answered is, "What was Paul referring to when he quoted this verse?" Was he referring to the eternal destiny of Esau or the "gift of the birthright," a gift that was crucial to the lineage of the Israelite nation and the Messiah? E.W. Bullinger views this verse as a metonymy of the cause, meaning that the name Esau is stated as a reference to the whole of the descendents.⁵⁵ R.C.H. Lenski also expounds upon this issue viewing it as the means by which the whole of humanity could be brought into covenant with God by faith. He considers the door of entrance open to Abraham's entire household, Ishmael and Esau included as fulfillment of the Gen. 17.9-14 promise. Yet all, including Isaac and Jacob, would enter only by faith. Lenski concludes his thought regarding God's choice of Isaac "This "in Isaac," etc., cannot be regarded as a decree that was issued by the sovereignty of God and excluded Ishmael, Esau, etc., from the covenant and from salvation. The opposite was the fact: a blessed promise of the free grace of God that opened wide the door of the

⁵⁴ A. H. Konkel elucidates the breadth of the semantic range for the Hebrew word for hatred (אָנִי) in this N.T. reference to Malachi 1.2-3. He states with regard to the O.T. text, "The use of love and hate to describe the attitude toward a preferred wife as opposed to the one who was tolerated or even rejected (Gen 29:31, 33) lends to hate the sense of being unloved or not chosen, or even abandoned or rejected . . . When the prophet Malachi says "I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated" (Mal 1:2-3), he is emphasizing the sovereign choice of God; nevertheless, the rejection of Esau leads further to their judgment" in Willem A. VanGemeren, ed. *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, vol. 4, אָנִי, by A.H. Konkel (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 1257.

covenant of grace; but entrance was for them, as it was for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob themselves, covenant bearers though they were, by faith alone.⁵⁶ C.E.B. Cranfield concurs with Lenski asserting that neither the O.T. or Paul's reference to Jacob, Esau, or their descendants refer to their eternal destinies. The quotation refers rather to "the mutual relations of the two nations in history," and "What is in question is not eschatological salvation or damnation, but the historical functions of those concerned and their relations to the development of the salvation-history."⁵⁷

The second great historical figure discussed in the text is Pharaoh. Of him, it is said "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH" (Rom. 9.17).

Again, we must appeal to context. It should be assumed that the believers in the church at Rome were cognizant of the Exodus story and of Pharaoh. The use of such an illustration would have otherwise been useless. It should also be considered that the believers would have known that in the Exodus text, Pharaoh was given the opportunity to repent and let the Israelites go, but would not. Keil and Delitzsch tell us that ten times the hardening of Pharaoh's heart is ascribed to God, but it is also stated that ten times Pharaoh hardened his own heart.⁵⁸ Could this mean that the believers in Rome were not to take these verses as maxims regarding the inability of a man to repent or rather, as a

⁵⁵ E.W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), 544.

⁵⁶ R.C.H. Lenski, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Romans* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 593.

⁵⁷ C.E.B. Cranfield, "The Epistle to the Romans." *The International Critical Commentary*, vol. 2, (Norwich: Page Brothers, 1979), 479.

⁵⁸ C.F. Keil, and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 453.

commentary on the mercy of God, giving the opportunity to even the most hardened sinner? Certainly, contained in the narrative is the theme of God's sovereign choice as to placing one in history where He deems best (Prov. 16.4), but perhaps little more. In conclusion, did God prepare Pharaoh for destruction (vs. 23) or did Pharaoh prepare himself (an issue to be argued on a grammatical level)? Truthfully, the whole of the text seems to indicate a little of both.

Considering the issue of equity (Rom. 9.14) in this text, Elwell stresses that it was idiomatic to the teaching of Paul that God is fair (cf. Rom. 2.11; Eph. 6.9; Col. 3.25). He further states that "Paul taught that the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men (Tit. 2.11), and he certainly would have agreed with Peter, 'God is not willing that anyone perish, but that all come to repentance.'"⁵⁹

How does Paul deal with the issue of human responsibility? Specifically addressing the cynic who blames God for the outcome (Rom. 9.19-21), Elwell asserts "For those who so misunderstand God as to imagine that God works arbitrarily and on no moral basis whatsoever, let such an answer suffice. But Paul knew very well that election and predestination included human responsibility."⁶⁰ Again, referencing Pharaoh's own resistance to God's conviction and therefore, his responsibility for the sins he committed, he concludes "That God could work his will in and through the acts of humans in such a way that his was done and yet the human will was not violated, coerced or ignored is fundamental to biblical thinking . . . Paul stresses the sovereign freedom of God in order

⁵⁹ W.A. Elwell, "Election and Predestination." *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 228.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 228.

to silence proud human rebellion against God, not to make God appear unreasonable and dictatorial.”⁶¹

In conclusion, it can well be argued that the Romans nine scripture should not to be taken as a proof-text for the Doctrine of Unconditional Election. Conversely, it could be argued that those who take the scripture as such may be allowing their theology to decide the interpretation rather than comparing scripture with scripture.

Ephesians 2:1-3.

*1 And you were **dead** in your trespasses and sins,
2 in which you formerly walked according to the
course of this world, according to the prince of
the power of the air, of the spirit that is now
working in the sons of disobedience.
3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the
lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the
flesh and of the mind, and were by nature
children of wrath, even as the rest.*

The question that must be answered here is “how far does the metaphor extend?”

Does the statement that “you were dead” connote that the Ephesian believers had no capacity to respond to the presentation of the gospel message?⁶² Or does it simply speak of the hopeless state of the lifestyle they were living as unbelievers? Is the apostle saying that there is no capacity to hear and obey the gospel when presented; that only those whom God Himself makes alive will have the ability to believe? To take the metaphor further than a description of the spiritual conditions under which the Ephesians lived prior

⁶¹ W.A. Elwell, “Election and Predestination.” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 228-229.

⁶² Harold W. Hoehner in his detailed and comprehensive commentary on Ephesians, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 307 notes that the present active participle with its object “dead” (ὄντας νεκρούς) refers to the ongoing condition of the Ephesians before the God’s gracious quickening action.

to faith in the gospel (and to make faith a part of this life-giving process) seems to place upon it a theological assertion rather than a normal one.⁶³ These people were not “dead” in the fullest extent of the metaphorical meaning (i.e. they could decide many other issues relevant to their lives). Yet, they were living their lives without the knowledge of the glorious message of the grace of God! In conclusion then, mankind is born spiritually cut off from fellowship with God due to imputed sin (Rom. 3.23; 5.12). Salvation is of the Lord, YES! He convicts **all** men of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16.8-11). The non-meritorious ability to believe this message under the conviction of the Holy Spirit lies in the hearts of the recipients (Mt. 23.37; Rev. 22.17).

2. Does every human being have the responsibility to express his will in a positively or negatively toward the gospel, or is the expression of their will predetermined by God? In other words, there really is no choice and we are all merely acting out what God has determined for us as a result of His sovereign will.

If this assertion is true, then there appears to be biblical truths that are either invalidated or violated. The first of these being that the imperative mood, which is the “appeal of the author’s will to the will of the readers,” and is most commonly used for

⁶³ Some refer to verse 8-9, “For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not of yourselves, it the gift of God; not of works lest anyone should boast.” Here again, Hoehner refers to the grammatically awkward approach of the referent of the demonstrative neuter pronoun τοῦτο refer to faith (i.e. your faith) which is feminine in gender, or salvation (i.e. your salvation) which too is feminine in gender. Rather “it is best to conclude that it refers back to the preceding section.” Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 342-343. Also, Daniel B. Wallace in *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 334-335 considers the conceptual antecedent to be the most plausible approach.

commands, becomes a senseless and invalid mood in the Bible.⁶⁴ The command to “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved...” becomes an empty a hollow entreaty (Acts 16.31). Our Lord’s commands His followers to “love your enemies” or “be merciful, forgive, and do not judge or condemn,” (Mt. 5.44; Lu. 6.36-37). His final appeal to the disciples and, by extension, His commission to the Church places no real imposition upon them (Mt. 28.19-20). This also applies to the exhortations of the Epistles. The command to do anything is fruitless and empty; the believer possesses no capacity to accomplish the desired request unless God provides the will to do it.

Second, the very semantics of such words as “believe,” “trust,” “obey,” and “repent” are invalidated by the aforementioned assumption. These words carry an intrinsic connotation which must be theologically overruled if one is going to make them mean otherwise.⁶⁵

Third, as previously stated, the thought that man is in no wise given the ability to express his will in either belief or unbelief toward the gospel is contradictory to the judicial equity that God claimed for Himself and instilled in Israel and the Church (cf. Ps. 67.4; 96.10; 98.9; 99.4; Eph. 6.9; 1 Pet. 1.17). To condemn all and then be merciful to

⁶⁴ H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto, Canada: Macmillan Co., 1955), 174. Daniel B. Wallace notes that “the imperative mood is the will of intention . . . it moves in the realm of volition (involving the imposition of one’s will upon another) and possibility” in *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 485.

⁶⁵ The author understands that there are a number of verses in the Bible that infer God’s necessary presence in the process of salvation and repentance (cf. Rom. 2.4; Acts 5.31; 11.18; II Tim. 2.25). It is agreed that the Lord is the author and consummator of the process of salvation, reconciliation, and conversion. What is disputed is the equitable conviction of all men, and man’s ability to resist the Spirit of grace (Eph. 4.30; I Thes. 5.19).

only the few, not giving the remainder of human beings even the option violates even the simplest understanding of equity!

Fourth, to accept the doctrine of election, as those who adhere to high-Calvinism present it, means that we must accept certain hermeneutical presuppositions. For example, one must accept the supposition that the writers of the New Testament did not truly mean that anyone could believe (cf. Jn. 3.16; Rev. 22.17). They wrote in expansive terms “takes away the sins of the world” (John 1.29; I John 2.2), “whoever believes on Him” (John 3.16), but did not actually believe that they were true for everyone. Rather these verses were only for those to whom God gave the power to believe or come. By this definition our verse in Revelations twenty-two should read more like this “the one to whom *God wills to give the will to come* may take the water of life freely.” In Mathew twenty-three verse thirty-seven, where Jesus is weeping over Jerusalem, we should understand that Mathew (and therefore the Lord) actually meant “...I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling (*actually, God was unwilling to make you willing*). These interpretations would seem ludicrous at best. Yet, this is what we must conclude was in the mind of the authors if we adhere to this system. It appears better to this writer to leave the sovereignty of God and the free will of man in conflict than to accept the interpretive principles above.

Last, it can be seen that God has placed faith and grace together in the equation that results in salvation. If faith was not to be part of the human response to the message of salvation, how could we call it faith at all (Rom. 4.1-5, 16; 5.1-2; Eph. 2.8)? Faith need not be specified because it is included in the grace package. Grace alone saves us! Faith is merely an ingredient of grace itself.

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