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## Whosoever Will: A Review Essay

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# WHOSOEVER WILL: A REVIEW ESSAY

C. FRED SMITH\*

## INTRODUCTION

Calvinism has become an increasingly important but divisive issue among Baptists. Churches have divided over it, and it has led to no end of “bull sessions” among seminary students, who endlessly debate divine sovereignty and human free will, limited atonement, irresistible grace and related issues. It is in order to set forth a biblical as well as theologically sound perspective on these issues that David Allen and Steve Lemke offer this book based on papers delivered at the John 3:16 Conference held at First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Georgia in November 2008.

After an excellent sermon by Jerry Vines, the book is divided into two parts. Part One offers a critique of each aspect of the TULIP, the “Five points of Calvinism.” Sometimes an alternative way that the doctrine may be understood is offered, but other writers demonstrate why a specific doctrine is unbiblical and should be rejected. Part Two considers various doctrinal and practical questions that Calvinism raises. These are considered in light of theology, biblical teaching and concern for the life of the churches.

Jerry Vines’ sermon on John 3:16 sets a tone for the series as a whole. Like the essays that follow, the sermon is theologically and biblically rich. It is a solid exposition of the passage, chosen because of the “*Whosoever Will* believe in Him” clause. Thus, it is indicative of the direction of the essays themselves which will challenge the Calvinist idea that the offer of salvation is not made genuinely to everyone. The idea is challenged in this collection from biblical, historical, and theological directions, and the reader is left in the end with no doubt that, according to the solid testimony of Scripture, the offer of salvation is to everyone, the offer of salvation is genuine, and the offer of salvation is to be presented to everyone by Christians everywhere.

## PART ONE: TAKING ON THE TULIP

### Paige Patterson

Paige Patterson takes on the doctrine of total depravity and recasts it in the light of the biblical teaching. A wrong understanding of total depravity led to the misunderstanding that created the TULIP. By correctly setting forth what the Bible does and does not teach about depravity, Patterson highlights the host of problems that extreme Calvinism inevitably encounter when the doctrine of depravity is falsely construed.

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His contention is not that total depravity is a false teaching, only that the Scripture on it has been misunderstood. He goes to Romans 1-3, focusing on Rom. 3:10-17 as the linchpin Scripture on this doctrine. He shows that, while total depravity is scriptural, it is not quite the doctrine that Calvinism teaches. The main problem lies with the idea that total depravity means that the individual is completely unable to respond to God. Many Calvinists believe that this is true. God must do something in the soul of the sinner, who otherwise not only will not but cannot respond to God. God creates faith or he regenerates the soul so that the sinner can exercise faith. This leads to extreme ideas such as that regeneration can precede faith sometimes by days or even months. Patterson points out that nothing in the Bible necessitates this, and total depravity may be understood apart from the idea that the soul is totally incapable of responding to God.

Patterson ends with a story from WWII in which a sailor was left stranded in the water after his ship was destroyed. Blinded from the detonation and partially deafened, he could do nothing to save himself. However, he heard the sound of a rescue helicopter and was able to call out for help. They successfully lowered a rescuer and harness to him and got him out of the water. The sailor, like the soul, could do nothing to save himself and yet he was able to respond to the sound of the rescue helicopter. So also the human soul, upon hearing the call to repentance and faith, can respond, or not, even in a condition of total depravity.

### **Richard Land**

Richard Land's article, which he calls Congruent Election, is an effort to explain God's election in terms of His eternal perspective outside of time rather than in terms of the pre-temporal divine decree to choose who shall be elect and who shall not. He locates his discussion in the context of traditional Southern Baptist understandings of God's eternal purposes and human free will. Land recognizes that most Southern Baptists have been "neither fully Calvinists nor remotely Arminian" (49). Biblical authority necessitates belief in election for it is a biblical teaching just as is the teaching of human responsibility and free will. Land proposes a "congruent election model" which differs from unconditional election and which he believes is in line better with Scripture. Land sees two kinds of election: Abrahamic election and Salvation election. Calvinists, he contends, formulated their doctrine of election based on Abrahamic election, which is election of a whole people, because Calvin failed to distinguish properly between Israel and the church. Abrahamic election is corporate election of God's people. Salvation election is individual election of people from every nation and tribe and tongue for the purpose of their eternal salvation. How this works is difficult to see for election in Calvinist thinking has always been of specific individuals and that before the beginning of time. Land seems to locate election in God's eternal perspective outside of time. He believes that the elect are called to salvation and receive a solicitous call not an irresistible call. That is, they are called to salvation by God, who knows that they will accept. Land bases his argument on God's eternal—and therefore eternally present—experience of each human being and his or her response to the call to repentance and faith.

It appears that Land is locating election, how people will respond, in the foreknowledge of God. This is altogether biblical. It is not necessary, however, to differentiate this from an election that is unconditional. The proper focus of unconditional election should be on the fact that it is unconditional. Calvinists and their opponents have

focused too deeply on the problems of election (the location of election, the justice of predestination, whether there is double predestination, etc.), when the focus properly should be on how God's election (however it happens) is unconditional. It is the unconditional aspect of it that is significant. That is what is essential to Grace—which is the Calvinist concern.

Unconditional election stands as testimony to the fact that salvation is given apart from any merit whatsoever on the part of the recipient. It is the “unconditional” in unconditional election that emphasizes grace. Election as Land correctly points out arises from God's foreknowledge; not from some kind of arbitrary “good pleasure” on the part of God. It is not necessary to give up or modify the unconditional aspect of the doctrine to relocate the election aspect of it in God's foreknowledge and experience of the eternal now.

### David Allen

David Allen's challenge is to deal with a question that must be answered with a “yes” or a “no.” This one cannot be recast or modified; it is whether Scripture teaches limited atonement. He answers this question with a resounding “no” and makes the reason clear. Three major areas, he says, comprise the subject of atonement: intent, extent, and application. Intent relates to Christ's purpose, whether Christ desires equally the salvation of everyone or not. Extent asks: For whose sins was Christ punished? Was it for the whole world or just certain people? The application asks: When is it applied to the sinner? Is it in the eternal decrees of God, at the cross, or at the moment the sinner exercises faith in Christ? Allen begins with an extensive historical survey, piling up dead theologians like cordwood. He points out that not only Calvin but other reformers, some of the Westminster divines, and Puritans such as Richard Baxter, John Bunyan and Jonathan Edwards rejected limited atonement in their writings.

Allen, then, turns to exegetical considerations—a comparative examination of Scripture. He rightly points out that three key sets of text are important here: “the ‘all’ texts, the ‘world’ texts, and the ‘many’ texts” (78). These affirm an unlimited atonement, he says, although some Calvinists make much of the “many” texts. These texts are juxtaposed with texts that “Jesus died for His ‘church,’ His ‘sheep,’ and His ‘friends’” (78). The question is how these different sets of texts are to be reconciled. Allen properly affirms that the “church,” “sheep,” and “friends” texts are best seen in the light of the “all,” “world,” and “many” texts.

Allen takes on the Puritan John Owen, a defender of limited atonement, and demonstrates that Owen arrived at limited atonement apart from a careful consideration of the totality of Scripture and then read his theology into such passages as John 3:16-17. Contra Owen, Allen affirms that “no linguistic, exegetical, or theological grounds exist for reducing the meaning of ‘world’ to the ‘elect’” (80). Reading John 3:16-19 in the way that Owen does distorts John's purpose, says Allen. He sets Owen's understanding of John 3:16 against Dabney, who is a moderate Calvinist. Dabney's refutation of the high Calvinist position affirms, Allen points out, the clear meaning of John 3:16-19. Allen correctly points out that “the strength of any theological position is only as great as the exegetical base upon which it is built. Limited atonement (strict particularism) is built on a faulty exegetical foundation” (83).

Allen moves on to theological considerations. Here he takes on Owen again; critiquing his “double payment argument” (83), which states that it is unjust to require that the same sin be paid for twice. In other words, if Jesus paid for the sins of all people, then all people must be saved because they should not be required to pay for sins Jesus has already paid for. Since obviously not all people are saved, then Jesus did not pay for the sins of all people; therefore, these Calvinists argue, the atonement is necessarily limited. Jesus pays for the sins of the elect. The non-elect pay for their own, and are not required to pay for sins already paid. Thus there is no “double payment” for sins. Allen points out that this doctrine is not taught anywhere in the Scripture and most importantly “it negates the principle of grace in the application of the atonement—nobody is owed the application” (83).

One wishes that Allen had made more of this last argument, as it is a most telling criticism. The Calvinist error is to assume that specific sinners were purchased at the cross, rather than that a general opportunity for redemption was purchased for all. An analogy will help here. Many communities contract with a cable television provider. The community provides the right of way for the cable to be installed and offers tax breaks or other incentives for the company selected to provide cable services. The service is available to everyone in the community, but not everyone has cable. Cable service has not been purchased for every address but has been made possible for every address. By analogy, the local government is like Christ, making cable service (like salvation) available to everyone. The service is advertised—which is like the general call—and some choose to buy the service—like exercising faith in Christ. The fact that not everyone buys the cable service does not mean that the local government failed in its endeavor to provide the cable service. In the same way, if Jesus died for everyone but not everyone was saved, then that does not mean that the atonement failed. Jesus provided a service (eternal salvation) for every soul, if some do not buy in (exercise faith), that is no reflection of the success or failure of the provision.

Allen moves onto another argument by Owen: the so-called “treble choice argument” (86). This argument states that there are only three possible ways to look at the atonement: Jesus either died for all the sins of all men, for some of the sins of all men, or all of the sins of some men (86). Owens asserts that if Jesus died for all of the sins of all men, then all are saved; if he died for some of the sins of all men, no one is saved since some unatoned sins are left. Owen concluded that the only conclusion possible is that Jesus died for all of the sins of some men. Allen points out that the big problem with this is that Scripture nowhere teaches that anyone goes to Hell because no atonement was provided for them. They go to Hell because they refuse to believe and they reject the atonement that actually was provided for them: “The limitation was not in the provision of his death, but in the application” of that provision (86). The atonement Christ provided for all is applied to those who repent and trust Christ; it is not automatically applied to all men. The problem, as Allen correctly points out, is seeing the atonement as a payment made for specific people when Scripture itself does not treat it that way.

Logically, Allen points out, that those who hold to limited atonement commit the negative inference fallacy; they infer from some restricted statements in Scripture that Christ died only for the elect, when even those restrictive statements do not necessarily limit the atonement of Christ to the elect.

Allen ends with practical considerations. This is the weakest section of Allen's discussion, for whether a doctrine may be troublesome to some practices or to some other cherished doctrines has no bearing on whether the doctrine is true. If a doctrine is true, we must adjust our understanding of other doctrines and adjust our church practices to that reality. If it is not true, it naturally will have a negative effect on other doctrines and practices. The answer, in that case is to teach the truth and let practice fall in line with it.

Still, an awareness of the practical implications of a doctrine has some value. Allen is not alone in discussing practical matters and, in fact, anticipates some of the discussion in part two. The first problem he mentions, that limited atonement creates the problem of diminishing God's universal, saving will, is not really a problem at all. It would not be a problem at all if limited atonement were true, for in that case God's will to save would not be universal and this would be clear to everyone. The clear teaching of Scripture, however, is that God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." This necessitates that we reject the doctrine of limited atonement and interpret other doctrines including the work of Christ on the cross in light of God's universal will to save all men and in the light of how all men clearly are not saved.

Several of the other practical problems Allen raises really are aspects of the problem of the doctrine's impact on evangelism—evangelism, preaching, and altar calls. All three are really the same problem: if some people's sins are atoned for and others' not, we honestly could not call all men to repentance. It would be disingenuous to do so knowing that some who hear the call have no opportunity to be saved.

Allen also rightly points out that Calvinism is not the gospel, and we should not confuse the two. Problems of fellowship emerge when some people equate being Southern Baptist with being Calvinist (or equally, its opposite, equating being Calvinist with NOT being Southern Baptist).

Allen's theological and exegetical reasoning are difficult to refute. Limited atonement is often a sticking point for non-Calvinists and Allen shows us clearly why. In fact, many moderate Calvinists call themselves "four pointers" because they reject limited atonement as foreign to the Scriptures and foreign to our sense of justice. It is a much stronger position than affirming all five points of the TULIP.

### **Steve Lemke**

Irresistible grace is critiqued by Steve Lemke in the next article. It is a logical consequence of the first three doctrines in five-point Calvinism. If total depravity means we cannot respond to God, unconditional election means that God elects me to salvation despite my lack of ability to respond, and limited atonement that Christ specifically and directly purchased my redemption at the cross, then logically, I have no option of finally refusing the grace of God that is offered to me. By analogy – if certain specific cattle are loaded into a cattle trailer that is being driven to El Paso, then all of the cattle in that trailer will end up in El Paso. They really have no choice in the matter. If like cattle we are chosen, separated from the herd, and loaded on to the heaven-bound trailer, then we cannot resist the heavenly journey predestined for us.

Lemke sets forth to critique the doctrine from both biblical and theological perspectives. He points out in numerous Scripture passages that grace is treated as resistible. In an effort to bring the whole Bible to bear, Lemke begins with a discussion of Israel's election and their refusal to obey the Lord and uphold the covenant that God had made with them. This, however, is very different from the grace of God offered in salvation, something Land made clear in his article on election.

Lemke then turns his attention to examples from the New Testament. In Acts 7 Stephen rebukes the Jews who had rejected Jesus, accusing them specifically of "resisting the Holy Spirit" (118; citing Acts 7:51). Lemke's position is less strong when he deals with Saul's conversion. "Obviously," Lemke says, "Saul had resisted the conviction of the Holy Spirit . . . but now [on the Damascus Road] God broke through Saul's resistance in a dramatic way (119, citing Acts 9:17). This, however, is not an argument against irresistible grace. Calvinists gladly will affirm that many people are resistant initially and may refuse to trust Christ many times before finally repenting and turning to Christ. The examples of people being resistant, even for some time, before believing, do not count for them as evidence against the doctrine. The problem for the Calvinist, however, is why such a thing as resistance to conversion—on the part of those who eventually believe—even happens at all. It would make more sense for one who is predestined to salvation if they immediately embraced the gospel upon first hearing it.

Lemke's position is strongest when he turns to the ministry of Jesus. First, he cites Matthew 23:37: Jesus' lament over Jerusalem. This makes no sense at all if grace were irresistible. Jesus would have no reason, Lemke asserts, to lament over the hard-heartedness of people for whom the offer of salvation had never come (120). Turning to Luke 13, Lemke focuses on Jesus' statement that for a rich person to enter heaven is as hard as for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. Lemke says, "If Jesus were a Calvinist, he never would have suggested that it is harder for rich persons to be saved by God's irresistible grace than poor persons. Their will would be change immediately and invincibly upon hearing God's effectual call . . . but the real Jesus was suggesting that their salvation was tied in some measure to their response and commitment to his calling" (121).

Lemke supports his argument with word studies; pointing out first the Scriptures that reference God's desire to save all or to save whosoever. Thirty references are given; seven references are of Jesus himself giving an all-inclusive invitation. Four references are found in the epistles and finally, two references in John's Gospel. Lemke sums it up, "The Scriptures contain significant evidence against irresistible grace. The Bible specifically teaches that the Holy Spirit can be resisted" (129).

Lemke, then, offers a theological assessment of irresistible grace. He raises a series of concerns; for example, that irresistible grace reverses the biblical order of salvation. That is, it leads to the idea that one must be regenerated in order for repentance and faith to become possible; whereas the biblical teaching is that repentance and faith lead to regeneration. Again Lemke brings numerous Scripture passages to bear, showing that repentance comes first and then the receiving of grace.

Like Allen, and later, Streett, Lemke points out that this doctrine can weaken the significance of evangelism and missions and even damage the idea of the necessity of

conversion itself. Anticipating articles by Evans and Little, Lemke also points out that serious problems arise with this doctrine because it teaches that God forces the human will. If the human will is not free, then God becomes the author of evil.

In a surprising argument, Lemke counters the contention that irresistible grace is part of a high view of the sovereignty of God, one which maximizes his sovereignty and his glory (153-62). Arguing both from logic and Scripture, Lemke defends the idea that God's greater glory is best shown when salvation is freely offered and freely accepted: "We should understand sovereignty and glory from God's perspective, not from a human perspective" (162).

One problem with either refuting or defending the doctrine of irresistible grace is that it is not falsifiable. Calvinists can contend that anyone who rejects the gospel was never elect and that everyone who repents and believes received an effectual call. There is no test case that can be set up by which it could be actually determined that someone resisted a genuine offer of the grace of God. However, when we resort to both Scripture and experience, as Lemke has done, we find ground to reject the doctrine. It is noteworthy that such a significant doctrine, if it were true, is nowhere explicitly taught in Scripture. Second, while it cannot be disproved, it is contrary to our own experience of how people respond to the gospel. Therefore, we have no warrant to regard it as anything other than false. If the doctrine were true, then our experiences are false and Scripture is false. This simple fact has been made clear to us in Lemke's article.

### **Kenneth Keathley**

Kenneth Keathley's essay, "Perseverance and Assurance of the Saints," is a bit puzzling at first read. Clearly, two different topics are in view here, not just one. Perseverance either is or is not an ontological reality in the life of believers and in the teaching of Scripture, while assurance is a subjective state of mind for the believer. At times it appears that Keathley regards the two as one in the same. The two should be regarded as separate. Many people know of situations where an individual claims absolute assurance of their salvation even though there is no evident manifestation of faith in their lives. Others struggle with doubt, while manifesting a lifestyle of love and service to Jesus Christ. Clearly assurance of one's salvation is not the same thing as perseverance of the saints, and it would have been helpful if Keathley had focused on the objective biblical teaching rather than the believer's subjective experience.

Having linked assurance and perseverance though, Keathley attempts to defend his own variation of the evidence-of-genuineness position that he believes resolves the tension between those biblical texts that speak of assurance of the believer's position in Christ and those texts that warn of judgment and admonish the believers to persevere. He begins his proposal with the matter of present certainty, which he says traditionally has been answered in three ways: 1) Roman Catholicism says assurance is not possible. 2) The Reformers treated assurance and genuine salvation as essentially the same thing. They believed that if you had genuine faith you also must have assurance. 3) The Puritans and most modern evangelicals have believed that assurance is logically deduced based on the changed life of the believer. In other words, for the Puritans and modern evangelicals "the basis of assurance . . . is sanctification, not justification" (169).



Keathley believes that the second option is the best one. Assurance of salvation is founded “on Jesus Christ and his work for us—nothing more and nothing less” (171). However his outworking of this moves away from a strict understanding of it as he presents it.

Keathley’s major focus is on eventual certainty. He says that knowing that one is presently saved is not the same as knowing one will be saved ultimately, and sets out three possible views: 1) apostasy is possible, the Arminian view; the view that current certainty is no guarantee of future salvation; 2) apostasy is not possible, which is the Calvinist and free grace view; and 3) apostasy is threatened but not possible. It is this third one that Keathley wants to focus on and modify. As he understands it, the warning passages are a part of what preserves believers in their faith; guaranteeing that their assurance is genuine.

What Keathley offers is a variation on the evidence-of-genuineness position. It has four parts:

- 1) Objectively, assurance is founded on the work of Christ on the cross, not on the subjective experience of the believer. Keathley is on solid ground here. Assurance is a form of faith. Believers should trust what God has said, not their experience or the quality of their faith, or any other factor in their lives. God’s word, and only God’s word is a certain basis for truth, and for faith that one is genuinely saved.
- 2) Subjectively, when one exercises saving faith, there is absolute assurance of salvation at the time. Doubts may come later—and for many certainly they do—but “a core conviction remains” (185). It is not quite clear what Keathley means by this. Does he mean that believers have doubts while maintaining assurance, and they hold assurance and doubt in tension in their minds? Does he mean that believers doubt their own salvation while the core conviction about the saving work of Christ remains? Or does he mean that believers may doubt but they will always return to a state of assurance? He never clearly states his position.
- 3) Perseverance is promised to the believer and guarantees that one’s faith will remain. However, if this is the case, it is hard to see why the warning passages matter at all. If perseverance is a promise (something the believer holds to by faith), then the warning passages in Scripture have no real place. If the warning passages are part of what preserves the believer, by (in a sense) scaring the believer into faithfulness, then perseverance is not promised, but is secured by works.
- 4) Finally, judgment and reward for the saved is based on the quality of the life they live. This is a traditional position, based on numerous scriptural promises of rewards in heaven.

Keathley’s proposal has the strength of basing assurance on what Christ has done, not on the believer’s subjective experience. He rightly recognizes that good works themselves do not provide real assurance. One’s good works relate to the past and help confirm that one has been saved but are no substitute for the promises based on the work of Christ on the

cross. At best, they play a “supporting role” (186). They merely help confirm objectively what the believer already knows subjectively: that he is the object of God’s love. He sees the warning passages in Scripture as “pointing out the obvious: genuine belief will not turn back” (186). It is hard to see how this is the case. Had the purpose of these passages been to point out that apostasy is impossible, would not the authors simply have said apostasy is impossible. Also, it is hard to see how he reconciles this with his earlier affirmation that the warning passages somehow work to keep the believer in the faith. We must look elsewhere for an understanding of these passages while affirming that “eternal life” really is eternal and that anyone who is genuinely saved is saved forever. Keathley is seeking to make good sense of a thorny issue and portions of his proposal are helpful. It, however, needs further development especially on the place of the warning passages, and he needs to distinguish more clearly between objective and subjective aspects: perseverance and assurance.

## PART TWO: RELATED QUESTIONS

### **Kevin Kennedy**

Part Two raises some theological and practical concerns inherent in Calvinism and in some respects covers ground previously covered in the other essays. The first essay is Kevin Kennedy’s “Was Calvin a ‘Calvinist’?: John Calvin on the Extent of the Atonement.” Kennedy echoes some of David Allen’s essay but focuses specifically on Calvin. He cites numerous passages where Calvin emphasizes the universal language of Scripture related to the atonement and even where he interprets the “many” passages in universal terms. As one reads Kennedy’s clear and lucid essay, one can almost imagine Calvin sitting in on one of the perennial “bull sessions” that happen in seminary student lounges, where limited atonement and other aspects of Calvinism are hotly debated. One imagines Calvin himself arguing against the contentions of the most ardent Calvinists in the room, using language very similar to that used by opponents of Calvinism today.

Kennedy points out that unbelievers who hear and reject the gospel are held doubly culpable; first, for the sins that have condemned them; and second, for rejecting the offer of salvation. If the offer was not genuine, one would not be culpable for rejecting it; so implicitly, even in these passages, one sees that Calvin was no proponent of limited atonement. What is the value of an essay like Kennedy’s? After all, whatever Calvin may have believed, Calvinism today is what it is. Does it matter whether Calvin held to one of the most controversial aspects of Calvinist doctrine? In fact it does matter, and Kennedy has given much help to serious students and inquirers on this point.

First, Kennedy’s essay corrects a serious misunderstanding of Calvin’s theology; a misunderstanding held by Calvinists and non-Calvinists alike. No longer can ardent Calvinists say with more zeal than knowledge “Calvin held that . . .” While this fact alone does not disprove limited atonement, it does make it clear that the doctrine is itself a misunderstanding of its supposed source.

Second, for those whose confidence in their Calvinist faith is based on a misapprehension that Calvin is at one with popular Calvinism, and are sure that, if Calvin really were here participating in that seminary bull session, he would argue unequivocally for

the whole TULIP, Kennedy's essay destroys that misplaced confidence. Hopefully, this will drive the ardent Calvinist to a fresh consideration of his own theological position and a humble recognition that his zeal should go no further than his own personal and careful perusal of primary sources. Those who are considering Calvinism should take warning to avoid depending on what they hear or read until they too have read the primary sources. Many have been led to accept or reject something they understand only through hearsay and Kennedy has given these Christians solid help.

Finally, Kennedy's essay serves as a reminder to us all that Calvin himself was a serious Bible scholar willing to allow his theology to be shaped by the teachings of Scripture and not by any set system or dogma. The criticism that Calvinism is a matrix or filter between believers and their Bibles is well apt. The fact that Calvin himself let the Bible shape his theology is a methodological challenge to re-examine our own theological biases with Scripture.

### **Malcolm Yarnell**

Malcolm Yarnell discusses "the Potential Impact of Calvinist Tendencies upon Local Baptist Churches." His is one of the clearest and most lucid of the essays. Still, the warning "adopt this teaching and these bad consequences will follow" is difficult to prove, and Yarnell's success in the endeavor is mixed.

Calvinism, he believes, will wreak havoc on traditional Baptist polity and practice due to certain ecclesiological tendencies inherent in the teaching. For one thing, whereas Baptists have emphasized the New Testament church as the basis of their practice, Calvin emphasized "the ancient church." The ancient church is a more hazy (217) concept than the New Testament church and brings in traditions and beliefs that depart from the New Testament practice. The ancient church includes, for Calvin, Old Testament believers (his commentaries refer to Moses and David leading "the church," which is a startling idea to most readers today), the New Testament church, and the early church up to the early middle ages. Thus Calvinism permits a broad range of practices and doctrines that completely are foreign to the New Testament.

A major problem for Baptists in this regard is that in Calvin's conception even Christ was "a participant in and subject to the ancient church's forms" (218, citing *Institutes* 4.11.4). This inherently undermines biblical authority and allows for a host of ideas and innovations completely foreign to the New Testament, such as infant baptism and a structured hierarchy over the congregation. Some Baptist churches have adopted some of these innovations while eschewing others. Clearly the warning is apt and churches that adopt Calvinism should be careful to distinguish between Scripture and Calvin's way of treating Scripture.

Yarnell says that Calvin found a basis for religious intolerance in his reading of both Scripture and Augustine, which led him to agree to the burning of Servetus, for example. Yarnell, while believing that Baptists today would not ever go that far, sees Calvinist theology as a threat to liberty of conscience, which is foundational to Baptist life. It is hard to see how this would happen. Calvin exercised both secular and religious authority in Geneva, something few, if any Baptists today would have opportunity to do.

Yarnell also sees Calvinism as a threat to congregation polity. He believes that adopting some kind of hierarchy within church life is an inevitable result of holding to a Calvinist doctrine. Many Baptist churches have adopted elder rule. The creation of a church hierarchy, however, is not inevitable, and Yarnell would have done well to have developed this further showing why elder rule is wrong and how Calvinism has influenced this shift in polity. Instead, feeling pressure to cover broader ground, he presents this problem in general terms and in just a few sentences.

An interesting threat that Yarnell sees is an antinomian tendency in Calvinism. Calvin, he says, believed that maintaining moral purity among church members was not necessary for the church, which exists anywhere the sacraments are administered and the Bible is preached. Nothing else was necessary. Calvin believed that the Anabaptists were wrong for insisting on regenerate church membership and separation from worldly people and practices. While Calvin believed that ideally the church should be holy, he did not see it as realistic, and he did not think it was proper to insist up on it. Yarnell believes that these tendencies explain why Reformed churches are willing to innovate with regard to the church whereas Baptists have been reluctant to do so. In his discussion, he does not get specific but leads one to think of the recent struggles of some Presbyterian denominations over such matters as the admission of homosexuals into the ministry and their willingness to established doctrine and practice well outside the boundaries of Scripture.

One wishes that Yarnell had tempered his warning here with recognition that this antinomian tendency is not inevitable for every church that adopts Calvinist doctrine. Many Presbyterian and Reformed churches have maintained their doctrinal and moral foundations even in the face of significant pressure to change. The “old evangelical” tradition in American Christianity was driven largely by the Presbyterian and Reformed wings of the church. Until recent years, Baptists have done very little in the larger evangelical world. It has been Presbyterians, such as those at Princeton in the nineteenth century and Westminster in the twentieth who have upheld and defended the inerrancy and authority of Scripture and who have insisted upon building doctrine squarely on the Bible in areas of Christology, Soteriology, and Theology proper. This presents a challenge to those who would say that a liberalizing tendency is inevitable in Calvinist doctrine. It is not.

Another matter that Yarnell overlooks is that when many Baptist churches adopt “Calvinism” they are adopting the TULIP, which essentially is a soteriology with broader theological implications, not the full range of Calvinist doctrine. A church can embrace the TULIP, if they believe it is fully scriptural—admittedly a difficult thing to do after reading this volume—without adopting every aspect of Calvin’s thoughts. As Calvinism recently has grown among Southern Baptists, the usual departure from Baptist doctrine and practice has been the adoption of elder rule by some. Other departures have been far less common. Still, Yarnell’s warning is worthy of our attention. Churches embracing the TULIP need to be aware and intentional about what they are rejecting as much as about what they are adopting.

### **R. Allen Streett**

R. Allen Streett’s essay, “The Public Invitation and Calvinism,” highlights some critical and practical issues previously discussed by Lemke and Allen. Streett contends that a public invitation in worship and in evangelism is thoroughly biblical and proper. He

examines even the Old Testament, in which he finds numerous examples where God, Moses, Joshua, Elijah and Josiah called publicly for commitment and action on the Word of God. For example, Joshua called the people to make a commitment, “choose this day whom you will serve” (Josh. 1:15). Josiah had the Law read aloud; and he made a public commitment to do according to what the Lord had said, and the people followed him in it (2 Kgs. 23:3).

In the New Testament, Jesus called people to public and personal commitment at various times. It was not enough simply to hear the word. Paul, Peter, and Philip made direct appeals for people to exercise faith. Streett points out that baptism was the response to the invitation to trust Christ. One’s profession of faith upon baptism was not separate from one’s baptism.

Streett points out that throughout the history of the church, with the exception of Roman Catholicism, there has been a public invitation to repentance and faith as an integral part of the church’s life and evangelistic practice. Clearly, the public invitation was not an innovation born out of revivalism and the Second Great Awakening.

Streett devotes a great deal of attention to Martyn Lloyd-Jones who vigorously spoke against the giving of public invitations. Streett makes it clear that Lloyd-Jones’ concern was with the invitation as a form of coercion or psychological manipulation and that sometimes people respond to public invitations for wrong motives. He also was concerned that people get the idea that it is walking forward in response to the invitation that actually saves people rather than the finished work of Christ. Streett acknowledges these concerns and points out that proper and the careful preaching of the gospel coupled with a right motive on the part of the evangelist will correct these problems. The public invitation should not be abandoned merely because it is sometimes abused.

Finally, Lloyd-Jones was concerned that the public invitation supplants “the work of the Holy Spirit” (249). Streett answers this one by pointing out that the evangelist and the Holy Spirit work together in issuing the call to nonbelievers. He quotes Revelation 22:17, “the Spirit and the bride say come.”

In response to Calvinists and some Baptists who have abandoned the giving of a public invitation, he turns to a point of Calvinist doctrine: the outer, universal call and the inner, specific call. The evangelist issues the outer call while the Holy Spirit issues the inner or effectual call. Streett recognizes that not everyone who responds to the outer call is regenerated; only those who respond to the inner call experience genuine salvation. Streett fails to recognize, though, that this is no solution to committed and doctrinaire Calvinists. It is the reality of the difference between these two calls that biases many Calvinists against issuing what they see as a useless and ineffectual call. Streett is on stronger ground when he shows that this outer general call is both biblical and historical.

### **Jeremy Evans and Bruce Little**

The last two articles are by Jeremy Evans and Bruce Little and deal with the matter of human freewill and God’s sovereignty. Evans focuses on the question of whether free decisions and actions are possible. Contra high Calvinism, that all of our decisions and

actions are determined, Evans defends the idea of libertarian freedom; even though my actions may be determined by antecedent conditions, I am still free with regard to my decisions and resulting actions.

He directly applies this to the concept of irresistible grace, which he sees as an unnecessary doctrine. If my decision is free—even the decision to trust Christ—even though antecedent conditions have led me to that decision, then there is no need for a doctrine of irresistible grace or effectual calling. He rightly points out that if our decisions are not free, these doctrines are necessary; but if they are free, then they inherently would interfere with free will.

Evans' essay addresses a host of questions that do not seem directly pertinent to this issue, such as the place of divine aseity and the question of whether this is the best possible world. He rightly recognizes that it does not matter whether sin is necessary for the best possible world to be actualized, because the argument sets up a bizarre relationship between God and the world, one in which God both requires sin and opposes sin in the process of actualizing the world as we have it. In other words, God is divided against himself and reveals himself in ways contrary to his true nature. Evans does not deal with Scripture that are troublesome for this issue, and one wishes that he had. The classic example involves how God "hardened the heart of Pharaoh," as well as passages in the Prophets that indicate that God chose and used Assyria for His purposes before judging them.

Bruce Little's essay, "Evil and God's Sovereignty," raises the question of whether we commit free acts or whether God causes us to commit sinful acts. Little recognizes that it is incoherent to say that God is the author and ultimate cause of every sin we commit. He cites Deuteronomy 28 to show that the Bible treats human beings as free agents who have the capacity to make significant moral choices. If God's word sees it this way, we can do no less. Little seeks to bridge theological and pastoral concerns in answering these questions; and his commitment to letting the Bible have the last word is refreshing.

Still, the issue of God's relationship to sin remains; Both Evans and Little specifically reflect on how, if God causes us to act, are we responsible for the sins we commit? However, can we maintain the goodness of God if we believe that he somehow requires evil for greater goods to come? Evans especially has helped us see that God is not required to cause evil. Further consideration of the matter is necessary. The world God actualizes is one to which he relates contingently. This is because of human free will, which both Evans and Little have defended. In a perfect (i.e. unfallen) world, the problem of evil does not emerge. In a world where God sovereignly decrees all things that happen, the problem is that God is both the author and opponent of evil. In a world such as the one in which we live, God does not cause evil but human beings freely choose to commit evil acts, and God acts for his purposes in the world that results. Thus, God both condemns the king of Assyria for his evil, and uses him for His own purposes (Isaiah 10). While God is not responsible for evil and honestly reveals his opposition to it in Scripture, he relates to a world in which evil exists in order to actualize such goods as He chooses for His own purpose.

## CONCLUSION

Allen and Lemke's collection of essays offers a valuable corrective to the excesses of both Calvinists and Arminianists. Both extremes fall into unbiblical understandings of ultimate reality, including how God relates to the world and to his church. This is not to say that both are utterly wrong. Truth lies somewhere else entirely. Clearly, such Calvinist concepts as total depravity and divine election, if construed carefully, are taught in the Bible. However, other concepts such as limited atonement and irresistible grace clearly are not there, as the Arminians contend. Perseverance, the saved truly are saved forever, is biblical as well, and yet the warnings against apostasy must be given closer attention than has been the case in the past.

While the practical consequences of Calvinism may or may not emerge in every church that adopts the system, they are issues about which Baptists should be aware. As we seek to be thoroughly biblical in our theology, especially as it relates to our great salvation given to us in Christ, we must all give careful attention to Scripture, to the primary sources of every theological system that offers itself for consideration, and to how certain doctrines may affect church practice. *Whosoever Will* has gone a long way in making this possible and will be invaluable in the years ahead to help churches avoid the excesses of Calvinism without rejecting the clearly biblical teachings found there. Let us all hope that these writers will expand upon their reflections in future writings, and that churches and pastors will take to heart, not only the viewpoints expressed here, but the examples of careful thought, attention to primary sources, and the proper use of Scripture, when future theological controversies and questions emerge.