# FOUNDERS JOURNAL

FROM FOUNDERS MINISTRIES | WINTER 2024 | ISSUE 128

# A MEDLEY OF REFORMED RELEVANCE


FOUNDERS
MINISTRIES

**www.founders.org**

Founders Ministries is committed to encouraging the recovery of the gospel and the biblical reformation of local churches. We believe that the biblical faith is inherently doctrinal, and are therefore confessional in our approach. We recognize the time-tested Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689) as a faithful summary of important biblical teachings.

---

The Founders Journal is published quarterly (winter, spring, summer and fall). The journal and other resources are made available by the generous investment of our supporters.

You can support the work of Founders Ministries by giving online at:

founders.org/give/

Or by sending a donation by check to:

Founders Ministries
PO Box 150931
Cape Coral, FL 33915

Please send all inquiries and correspondence for the Founders Journal to:

officeadmin@founders.org or contact us by phone at 888-525-1689.

Visit our web site for an online archive of past issues of the Founders Journal.

# CONTENTS

Tom Nettles

# Introduction:
## A Medley of Reformed Relevance

This edition of the Founders Journal puts together articles on a broad spectrum of specific topics but all informed by the big ideas of the Reformed Confessional heritage.

Ottavio Palombaro, in addition to having gained a (Th.D.), also gained a Ph. D. in economic sociology along with a BA in cultural anthropology. His expertise includes a wide range of theological, sociological, philosophical, linguistic, and musicological subjects. His article in the Founders Journal focuses on John Knox and his biblical/theological/existential interaction with the question of female leadership broadly conceived. He describes the purpose of the article as an evaluation of "whether the view of John Knox on gender and leadership was Biblical and what lesson can be learned from the controversy between John Knox and queen Mary as applied to today's shifts in gender and sexuality both in society and in the church." As a fundamental principle of biblical presentation, Knox said, "So I say, that in her greatest perfection, woman was created to be subject to man." That principle then is teased out through actual biblical phenomena as noted by Knox and elucidated by Palombaro. To those who may be deluged by post-modern standards having the shock of Knox come before them, concluding that he was a "horrid man," the author noted that "they are using modern glasses in retrospection, neglecting the contextual historical as well as cultural realm into which Knox blew his apocalyptic trumpet." None can doubt that Knox was a Calvinist, indeed a fully convinced Reformer with a biblical worldview, but, as Palombaro observes, that does not mean that he was a chauvinist. Rather that could mean that he had a more profound and excellent regard for femaleness than any of today's so-called

egalitarians. Judging from Knox's grasp of biblical womanhood, Palombaro writes, "Just as women are to submit to their husband in the family, and just as men should be pastor in the church, so the issue of women in the military or transgender males playing female athletics are examples of how Knox had a point in his consideration upon human constitution." This is a highly relevant and salubrious sip drawn from an aged and tested wineskin.

Chris Osterbrock earned the D. Ed. Min. in Biblical Spirituality from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Presently he is a PhD Student in Historical Theology, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary. He serves as senior pastor of First Baptist Church of Wellsboro, PA. and is author of What is Saving Faith? Chris presents us with a symphony and chorus of inexhaustible beauty in the "The Stingless Death,." While this theme of Christ's victory over death, even the wages of sin, is a universal Christian theme, the author focuses on the Baptist tradition of interpretation and practical application of 1 Corinthians 15:55. Keach, Gill, Wallin, Booth, Fuller, Ryland, Jr., Boyce, and several others have their say on this triumphant song. Osterbrock notes, "The individual authors may elucidate different sides of the gemstone, but Particular Baptist tradition holds together a cohesive interpretation. Herein we examine how this verse was understood in Baptist life through 200 years." Among the facets of this scriptural gem, Baptist exposition has explained "the providence of God in death, a secured new life to come, a song to be sung in sanctification as well as glorification, and a song applied as a salve to extinguish sin in the present life." It has given rise to celebrative imagery of intense poetic impulse such as the exclamation of Abraham Booth, "Thy haggard form I plainly discern; but where, where is thy sting? . . . for, behold! Thy sting is entirely and eternally gone. Jesus, the glorious victor, has plucked it from thee." And finally, this ultimate enemy becomes the path to unblemished holiness. "Here in death," the author deduces from the expositions investigated, "the Christian finds perfect mortification of sin and depravity, and in death there is the perfect sanctification of the body and soul for glory."

Craig Biehl earned his Th.M. from Dallas Theological Seminary and a Ph.D. in Systematic Theology from Westminster Theological Seminary. His books deal with the power of Reformed theology in promoting Christian spirituality, the power of orthodox thought, and the futile systems promoted by unbelief. In his article, "Are God's Justice and Mercy Incompatible?" Craig Biehl unfolds the consistency of biblical orthodoxy to engage serious philosophical objections to the Christian doctrine of God. Letting Theodore M. Drange speak for one specific argument against the existence of God, he sets forth this supposedly inescapable moral dilemma. A god who is just—and a god must be just—would "treat every offender with exactly the severity deserved." But a god must show the tenderness of mercy and so would treat "every offender with less severity" than deserved. Since these necessary attributes for a god contradict, a god cannot

exist. Mercy perverts justice, and justice militates against mercy. Biehl brings to this unbreakable dilemma the biblical teachings on the person of Christ and the nature of the atoning work of Christ. "As a man, Christ was the perfect substitute for mankind. As God and man, He was the perfect mediator between God and man. And as God, His suffering and death paid an infinite penalty for the sin of mankind. This He did once for all time, never to be repeated." The substitutionary, propitiatory atonement made by Christ in covenant obedience to the Father fully satisfies the demands of both justice and mercy. God is "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Christ" (Romans 3:26 NASB). Does this violate either absolute justice or the extension of mercy to the violator of God's law? Biehl shows that "In this way, salvation by faith upholds God's righteous justice. 'Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law' (Rom 3:31)." In this justice-is-contrary-to-mercy objection to the God of the Bible we have "an example of what besets the best of atheistic arguments." As Creator, Sustainer, and Judge—and whose image actually establishes all the rules of logic, justice, compassion—God solves this apparent moral contradiction "according to His wisdom." But, as Biehl points out, even this infinitely powerful, logically consistent, and surpassingly wise solution appears to rebellious man as foolishness. But to those who believe, it is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Robert Gonzalez, Academic Dean and a professor of Reformed Baptist Seminary since 2005, in "The Saving Design of God's Common Grace" gives an exposition of this fundamental biblical proposition: though common grace "does not guarantee the salvation of its recipients," it is nevertheless "saving in its design." In accord with Romans 2, "God sincerely intends the kindness and patience he shows to all sinners (whether elect or non-elect) to lead them unto saving repentance." After arguing this case with careful exegesis and in interaction with the hyper-Calvinist wing of theologians, Gonzalez concludes "from the evidence above we may conclude a saving design in the indiscriminate common grace God showers on all men whether elect or non-elect."

This is of the nature of a Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation theological idea. Although it is perfectly just and holy for God to allow humanity to choose its own course of action on the basis of its preferences, God's calls to believe the gospel or repent heartily from sin are in their nature calls for restoration to a non-cursed relationship with God. He calls neither to hypocritical faith nor merely feigned repentance. He is under no moral impetus, however, to provide effectual grace by which saving faith and repentance are truly manifested. He may justly leave all men or as many as he deems it fitting and consistent with his wise decrees to continue in their course of purposeful rejection of both his moral commands or his overtures of engagement for restoration. Both the call of the gospel and the call of creation and other manifestations of common grace

have as their absolute moral end a cessation of rebellion against God and an inclusion as a true worshipper of Jehovah.

Each of these articles looks seriously at the Reformed confessional stance and shows its powerful relevance to any moral, cultural, or religious issue.

---

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Tom has most recently served as the Professor of Historical Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He previously taught at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School where he was Professor of Church History and Chair of the Department of Church History. Prior to that, he taught at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary. Along with numerous journal articles and scholarly papers, Dr. Nettles is the author and editor of fifteen books. Among his books are *By His Grace and For His Glory*; *Baptists and the Bible*, *James Petigru Boyce: A Southern Baptist Statesman*, and *Living by Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Theology of Charles H. Spurgeon*.

Ottavio Palombaro

# Reforming Sexuality? Gender, Leadership and the Bible in the Controversy Between John Knox & Queen Mary

*"My people infants are their oppressors, and women rule over them."*

**Isaiah 3:12**

Starting decades ago, many, especially in the universities, have lost faith in the Western civilization narrative. While this is not necessarily a new phenomenon, few have been the voices in the academia wanting to explore the possible reasons that led to such state of things. In order to reflect upon what led to this, one has to address by implication also the issue of leadership. The past decades have seen a progressive value shift from the sexual revolution, through the rise of feminism, all the way to today's normalization of transgenderism. Side by side with this, and not necessarily just because of it, many Western countries have witnessed the weakening of governmental leadership. This has had an impact upon the leadership process both within the church and in society, to the point that Christians wanting to defend traditional views on these

topics are often marginalized. This tension should not surprise us as Reformed Christians given our pedigree.

John Knox (c. 1513 –1572) was a controversial yet relevant figure for this specific issue, able to shed light in the current controversy over gender, sexuality and leadership. He's often remembered as the "trumpet of the Scottish Reformation". Yet this immortal title came only after many struggles and arrests due to his controversial message, specifically also for his thoughts on gender and leadership. Knox was often a fugitive, enslaved in the French galleys for nineteen months, having to then flee persecution from "bloody Mary".[1] What made him uniquely controversial was his personality, his fiery preaching. He was also unashamed and vocal in addressing political matters, at the point of causing riots and sending "lightning thunders" to kings and lords because of their wrongdoings.[2]

During his exile in Geneva, Knox was strongly influenced by the thought and religious approach of John Calvin. He brought back from Geneva to his homeland, Scotland, a vision for the Reformation of the church and society, away from the tyranny of the papacy.[3] His most controversial and best-known pamphlet, published anonymously at first in 1558, was his treatise arguing against the government of women. The purpose of this article is to evaluate whether the view of John Knox on gender and leadership was Biblical and what lesson can be learned from the controversy between John Knox and queen Mary as applied to today's shifts in gender and sexuality both in society and in the church. Queen Mary I of England was in power at the time of Knox's reformation. She had also been negatively labeled as "bloody Mary" due to having executed many Protestants by burning at the stake. Mary of Guise was instead a member of the powerful French house of Guise whose ultra-Catholic Duke of Guise had been responsible with Catherine de Medici for the massacre of Huguenots during the Saint Bartholomew's night in France.[4]

Since Mary of Guise's project to transform Scotland into another Catholic nation under French control failed, she passed on the burdensome task to her daughter Mary queen of Scots, a Stuart, cousin of "bloody Mary" who became guilty of plotting to assassinate the Protestant half-sister queen Elizabeth, in 1586. Knox had to deal with those "three Marie" and it is therefore at least understandable why in dealing with gender and leadership his words were so sharp and condemning toward them for their acts and not just their gender. Knox felt that England was undergoing a crisis of leadership specifically as these women sought through injustices to counteract his religious reforms, but not merely on the basis of gender. Regrettably, as I will point out such distinction was not made by queen Elizabeth who despite sharing the Protestant faith did not appreciate Knox's thoughts. Knox had often associated Mary Tudor, with the evil Biblical character of Jezebel, due to her bloody crimes and idolatry.[5] In his preamble to the

first blast, Knox plainly attacks the government of women in the context again of those injustices perpetrated by the "three Marie":

> How abominable before God is the empire or rule of a wicked woman […] we hear [of] the blood of our brethren, the members of Christ Jesus, most cruelly to be shed; and the monstrous empire [government] of a cruel woman (the secret counsel of God excepted) we know to be the only occasion of all those miseries. […] I am assured that God has revealed to some in this our age, that it is more than a monster in nature that a woman shall reign and have empire above man. And yet, with us all there is such silence, as if God there with were nothing offended. […] And therefore, I say, that of necessity it is that this monstiferous empire of women (which amongst all enormities that this day do abound upon the face of the whole earth, is most detestable and damnable) be openly revealed and plainly declared to the world, to the end that some may repent and be saved.[6]

As Knox in his controversial pamphlet brings theological support to his position both from Scripture and the church fathers, he is nevertheless aware of those positive cases of women in leadership such as at the times of Judges or under queen Esther. However, as the parallel with Jezebel shows, Knox clarifies that unlike those pious and God-fearing Biblical examples, the women of his day pretended dominion over Scotland and England by being idolatrous, evil and scheming to subvert all justice through a mere tyrannical gynecocracy.[7] Therefore the attack of Knox is on women in leadership only insofar as through their false religion they promote corruption. Knox then expresses in detail his argument concerning gender and leadership ultimately establishing it as a rule even for the public sphere of government:

> To promote a woman to bear rule, superiority, dominion, or empire above any realm, nation, or city, is repugnant to nature; contumely [an insult] to God, a thing most contrary to his revealed will and approved ordinance; and finally, it is the subversion of good order, of all equity and justice. […] it is a thing most repugnant to nature, that women rule and govern over men. For those that will not permit a woman to have power over her own sons, will not permit her (I am assured) to have rule over a realm; and those that will not suffer her to speak in defence of those that be accused (neither that will admit her accusation intended against man) will not approve her that she shall sit in judgment, crowned with the royal crown, usurping authority in the midst of men. […] First, I say, that woman in her greatest perfection was made to serve and obey man, not to rule and command him. As St. Paul does reason in these words: "Man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man. And man was not created for the cause of the woman, but the woman for the cause of man; and therefore ought the woman to have a power upon her head" [1 Cor. 11:8–10] (that is, a cover in sign of subjection). Of which words it is plain that the apostle means, that woman in her greatest

> perfection should have known that man was lord above her; and therefore that she should never have pretended any kind of superiority above him, no more than do the angels above God the Creator, or above Christ their head. So I say, that in her greatest perfection, woman was created to be subject to man.[8]

These words must be framed within the sixteenth century context once again so foreign to today's culture so engraved in feminism and egalitarianism. According to a principle of nature, and not only of Scriptures, Knox believed women to be the weaker vessel, therefore being too frail to be able to bear the weight of authority in the public sphere. This is confirmed by the Reformer through a series of examples in history where women in leadership led to inconstancy, cruelty and lack of guidance.[9] By a logical procedure, questionable for some contemporary observers, Knox affirms that since the woman in the New Testament is not allowed to occupy places of authority in the church, all the more in public government this should ultimately be forbidden:

> But the Holy Ghost gives to us another interpretation of this place, taking from all women all kinds of superiority, authority, and power over man, speaking as follows, by the mouth of St. Paul: "I suffer not a woman to teach, neither yet to usurp authority above man" (1 Tim. 2:12). Here he names women in general, excepting none; affirming that she may usurp authority above no man. And that he speaks more plainly in another place in these words: "Let women keep silence in the congregation, for it is not permitted to them to speak, but to be subject, as the law sayeth" (1 Cor. 14:34). These two testimonies of the Holy Ghost are sufficient to prove whatsoever we have affirmed before, and to repress the inordinate pride of women, as also to correct the foolishness of those that have studied to exalt women in authority above men, against God and against his sentence pronounced.[10]

An equally important source of Knox's debates over gender and leadership comes from his prolonged personal dialogue with Mary Queen of Scots. If one goes to Edinburgh today, it is still possible to visit the outer chamber of the palace of Holyrood where Mary and Knox had these frequent dialogues.[11] From this detail of information, we gather first of all that Knox was willing to meet with her and, as he did so, he in no way displayed any form of sexism. The issue between the two was primarily a religious one rather than strictly a gender issue. Behind her false promises of support, Knox and the Protestants of Scotland in general recognized that she was often acting behind their back to suppress Protestantism through imprisonment, executions, and leading people to exile.[12] Mary at Holyrood had this series of five personal interviews with John Knox.[13] She condemned Knox's book for undermining her authority and seeking to plot against her. Through the book, so she complained, her subjects were called to obey Knox rather than her. However, Knox replied that both subjects and princes should obey God.[14] In light of Knox's persistence, she once declared these famous words: "I fear the prayers of John Knox more

than all the armies of England". From the dialogues between Knox and queen Mary emerges a very diplomatic and respectful attitude in Knox, while still not void of sarcasm toward those he perceived to be injustices of the queen against her subjects. Knox declared that if the realm would find no inconvenience in the government of a woman, he would be willing to submit: "like Paul under Nero". Essentially, Knox declared that it was not his intention to trouble the queen as a woman and surprisingly he expressed his hope that the queen could be blessed: "as Deborah in Israel".[15]

This shows how his critic of women in government was centered upon the religious and moral disputes of the day and it was not therefore an attack on women in general. However, not everyone was able to draw such distinction. Knox's ideas on women's rule did not encounter the favor even of the moderate Protestant queen Elizabeth. Some sources even point out the possibility that John Calvin himself might have commented that Knox's writing on the matter as unhelpful to the cause of the reformed faith. Knox's fiery words as contained in his book could perhaps make some contemporary reader's hair stand on end.[16] In fact, because of his position on gender and leadership some have recently pictured Knox as a: "horrid man" or a male chauvinist.[17] Yet by doing so, they are using modern glasses in retrospection, neglecting the contextual historical as well as cultural realm into which Knox blew his apocalyptic trumpet. The charges of evil government to the "three Marie" can be substantiated and considered as legitimate even from a modern point of view, regardless of the issue of gender. Even looking at the issue of gender, Knox dialogued, respected and obeyed the very women he condemned. His overall goal was not to degrade women but to rebuke and address their religious and moral shortcomings in hope of reformation both in the church and in Scottish society at large. Knox was playing on the biblical concept of women's rule as a sign of the judgement of God, not as a judgement of value upon women. What we see from this article therefore is that Knox might have been a Calvinist but not necessarily a chauvinist.

Also, we conclude that the evidence provided by Knox of unjust women in power throughout history does not necessarily validate per se the need for an exclusion of women from public governments. This is true also in light of the same evidence that historically the corrupting effect of power is no different in the case of men. Actually, many Biblical accounts are inclined to exalt godly examples of heroines in Israel, something that Knox himself, far from being a chauvinist, was well aware of. Women therefore can consider being involved in governmental capacities, if found to be godly. Yet, the fact itself raises the question: where are the men? This is a question that signals the fact that when such things happen men are not stepping up to do what they are supposed to do. In any case, Knox's approach to gender and leadership was solidly grounded on Scriptures and poses an important challenge to the contemporary weakening in governmental

leadership among many western countries. Such weakening is not necessarily related to women, but it does involve to some degree also changes in sexual roles and authority as a stimuli to such weakening of roles of authority in the family, in the church and in the public sphere. It is something that remains part and parcel of a broader cultural shift and reshaping of the universe of values holding together our current civilization. Women in governmental leadership as a widespread phenomenon, while not being necessarily something wrong, remains at least not so ideal from a Biblical perspective. Whenever such instance is described in the Bible it is within the framework of a national and political crisis. Also, the role of women must be kept in light of the parallel spheres of sovereignty. The same expectations or patterns we observe in the family should be observed in the church and likewise ideally in society. Just as women are to submit to their husband in the family, and just as men should be pastor in the church, so the issue of women in the military or transgender males playing female athletics are examples of how Knox had a point in his consideration upon human constitution.

This is where gender ideology comes into the picture. Feminism, the sexual revolution, homosexuality and transgenderism are to be seen all as consecutive steps toward the same direction, gradually threatening to reconstruct the very identity and cultural understanding of Western societies. When ancient societies, whether the Greeks or the Romans, reached such confusion of sexual identity and authority it was a sign of their downfall. Another implication, while not being the main original focus of Knox, concerns the role of women in the church, a point highly debated today among many modern evangelicals. While Knox deals with the issue of women in governments, once again with a focus upon ethically and religiously wicked women rather than women for women's sake, it is possible to infer from Scriptures themselves (1 Timothy 2:12-15) as well as from Knox's overall argument that by implication women should not be in leadership in the church. In this case we can confidently claim that it is the church that gave a bad example to society on this matter of leadership and then society simply followed the trend, as the representatives of the kingdom of God do indeed influence for good or for bad society at large. This is where John Knox could also inform in ascertaining who is more biblical in the current debate within Calvinistic circles between defenders of soft-complementarianism and defenders of patriarchy. As women are today appointed as pastors in many denominations, including Reformed denominations, and as many churches lose even confidence of how to define the word pastor, Knox's blasting trumpet sounds very loud, uncompromising as he was willing to face controversy in order to call us back to the Bible.

## NOTES:

[1] Crawford Gribben, "John Knox, Reformation History and National Self-Fashioning." Reformation & Renaissance Review 8.1 (2006): 61.

[2] Richard Kyle, "The Thundering Scot: John Knox the Preacher." Westminster Theological Journal 63 (2002):135.

[3] Hans J. Hillerbrand, eds. The Reformation. A Narrative History Related by Contemporary Observers and Participants (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1982): 362.

[4] David Laing, Selected Writings of John Knox (Dallas, TX: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1995), 439.

[5] William Croft Dickinson, John Knox's History of the Reformation in Scotland. Vol. 1 (New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 1950), 118.

[6] John Knox, The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women (London, UK: Blackmask, 2002), 1-2.

[7] Maria Zina Gonçalves De Abreu, "John Knox: Gynaecocracy, 'The Monstrous Empire of Women'." Reformation and Renaissance Review 5.2 (2003):166.

[8] John Knox, The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women (London, UK: Blackmask, 2002), 3-5.

[9] Stanford Reid, "John Knox, Pastor of Souls." Westminster Theological Seminary (September 1977): 12.

[10] John Knox, The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women (London, UK: Blackmask, 2002),

[11] Elizabeth Withley, The Plain Mr. Knox (Glasgow, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2001), 105.

[12] John Knox, The Reformation in Scotland (Edinburgh, SCT: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982): 155.

[13] John Spottiswood, The History of the Church of Scotland. Vol. 2 (Edinburgh, SCT: Ams Press, 1973), 6.

[14] Owen W. Chadwick, "John Knox and Revolution." Andover Newton Quarterly (1975): 250.

[15] Richard L. Greaves, Theology & Revolution in the Scottish Reformation (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian University Press, 1980),164.

[16] Preserved Smith, The Reformation in Europe (London, UK: Collier-Macmillian Ltd., 1966), 275.

[17] David Calhoun, "John Knox (1514-1572). After Five Hundred Years." Presbyterion 40 (2014): 3.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY:


Calhoun, David "John Knox (1514-1572). After Five Hundred Years." Presbyterion 40 (2014): 1-13. Accessed February 13, 2017. http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=ff3894b9-0f46-454f-8b38-4a7eff8edaf1%40sessionmgr4008&vid=0&hid=4209

Chadwick, Owen W. "John Knox and Revolution." Andover Newton Quarterly (1975): 250-266. Accessed February 13, 2017. http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=21f57b6e-cdc9-42bd-b62c-4ff3b78c883c%40sessionmgr4007&vid=0&hid=4209

De Abreu, Gonçalves Maria Zina "John Knox: Gynaecocracy, 'The Monstrous Empire of Women'." Reformation and Renaissance Review 5.2 (2003): 166-187. Accessed February 13, 2017. http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=774eb4f8-3303-4d2b-8044-4e98af6303ca%40sessionmgr4008&vid=0&hid=4209

Dickinson, William Croft John Knox's History of the Reformation in Scotland. Vol. 1-2. New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 1950.

Greaves, Richard L. Theology & Revolution in the Scottish Reformation. Grand Rapids, MI: Christian University Press, 1980.

Gribben, Crawford "John Knox, Reformation History and National Self-Fashioning." Reformation & Renaissance Review 8.1 (2006): 48-66. Accessed February 13, 2017. http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=38f80b9c-663b-4ccc-b1d7-715785977083%40sessionmgr4010&vid=0&hid=420

Laing, David Selected Writings of John Knox. Dallas, TX: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1995.

Hillerbrand, Hans J. eds. The Reformation. A Narrative History Related by Contemporary Observers and Participants. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1982.

Knox, John The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women. London, UK: Blackmask, 2002. Accessed February 13, 2017. http://public-library.uk/ebooks/35/36.pdf

____.The Reformation in Scotland. Edinburgh, SCT: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982.

Kyle, Richard "The Thundering Scot: John Knox the Preacher." Westminster Theological Journal 63 (2002): 135-149. Accessed February 13, 2017. http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=7b0550af-31bd-4432-a1ba-c78bb0f31ccd%40sessionmgr4010&vid=0&hid=4209

Reid, Stanford "John Knox, Pastor of Souls." Westminster Theological Seminary (September 1977): 1-21. Accessed February 13, 2017. http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=7cd49a84-3004-41cc-adf8-70dce5d23e0c%40sessionmgr4008&vid=0&hid=4209

Smith, Preserved The Reformation in Europe. London, UK: Collier-Macmillian Ltd., 1966.

Spottiswood, John The History of the Church of Scotland. Vol. 1-2. Edinburgh, SCT: Ams Press, 1973.

Withley, Elizabeth The Plain Mr. Knox. Glasgow, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2001.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dr. Ottavio Palombaro was born in Castiglione del Lago, Italy, and raised as a practicing Roman Catholic. He was saved by God's grace in 2011. He is an Italian Theologian, Sociologist and Cultural Anthropologist. His research focused on sociology of religion, church history and theology, as well as studies on Protestantism with a focus on Calvinism. He studied at the University of Rome "La Sapienza" (B.A.), at the University of Turin (M.A.), at the University "Statale" of Milan (Ph.D.) at Tyndale Theological Seminary, at the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary (M.Div.) and at the Free University of Amsterdam (Th.D.). He has taught in various academic institutions both in Europe and in United States of America. He has written more than a dozen high academic research articles and a book-autobiography (*From Rome to Reformed*). Ottavio Palombaro is also a Reformed Baptist pastor. He has a rich ministerial and educational background, with diverse experience in the United States and Europe. Ottavio deeply appreciates expository preaching and is passionate about seeing lives transformed by God's word. Ottavio is married to his wife, Heidi, and they have two children.

Christopher Ellis Osterbrock

# "How stingless death!": Surveying a Baptist Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:55

IAs Christian, the allegorical pilgrim, marched into the river, chest-deep and deeper, he rejoiced with a song: "O grave, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?" This comes from the second part of the Pilgrim's Progress, where John Bunyan (1628–1688) writes of the believer's approach to death. When the pilgrim ends the song, he hears at last the sounding of trumpets; the long journey is complete and he finally enters the Celestial City.[1] Herein is a Baptist interpretation of this hope-filled verse—no matter if this story is an allegory, it stands in a tradition that sees Christians singing triumphantly at death, believing they will meet their Lord immediately thereafter.

There is yet very little research in terms of collecting a Baptistic tradition of interpretation in biblical studies verse-by-verse, let alone book-by-book. However, through this very small survey, I observe several Baptist sources and deduce the interpretation and use of 1 Corinthians 15:55. The individual authors may elucidate different sides of the gemstone, but Particular Baptist tradition holds together a cohesive interpretation. Herein we examine how this verse was understood in Baptist life through 200 years; for what purpose was the verse used and what key doctrines were advanced through its interpretation? While much of the thought and application

from these verses can be found in other reformed traditions, the purpose here is to isolate and engage with an unambiguously Baptist tradition. The below sources are all from Particular Baptists beginning with the first published work in 1676 and ending with a work from 1883; these works are gathered from theological treatises, sermons, letters, and personal journals. There are numerous other sources, but the following suffice in surveying a tradition of use and interpretation of this verse among Baptists. The survey concludes that Particular Baptist tradition utilizes 1 Corinthians 15:55 to contend for the providence of God in death, a secured new life to come, a song to be sung in sanctification as well as glorification, and a song applied as a salve to extinguish sin in the present life.

## A Baptist Tradition in Death

The most obvious aspect of 1 Corinthians 15:55 is the use in a Christian approach to death. From 1677 onward, the surrounding verses provided for the Baptist doctrine both of the state of man after death and of the second coming. The Second London Confession of Faith (1689) provides explicit reference to 1 Corinthians 15.[2] There is one death for the saints; the soul departs from the body, but does not sleep, rather it inhabits a paradise where it is made holy forevermore. There, the soul awaits the second coming of Christ, when it shall return to a resurrected body, the same yet now glorified and immortal. The soul and body will reunite finally and forever. Samuel Waldron notes that this paradise, for the elect of God where the soul awaits the body, is not heaven. However, like heaven, it is a place with space and time—God alone is the only being not constrained by his own created order.[3] This confessional doctrine is not merely for head knowledge but for the purpose of ministering to the saints. Those who followed after this Baptistic confession of faith did not deviate from the position found here, but expounded upon this doctrine for application to themselves nearing death, and for their churches—for encouragement, fortitude, and worship. If the Lord is with his elect in life, he will certainly not forsake them in death; this is the working out of providence, even as the soul leaves the body. While there is little deviation from this confessional stance, there is a multitude of application drawn from the below sources regarding just this single verse. Doctrinal and practical teaching abounds from the pen of Baptist tradition.

## The Providence of God in Death

Following John Bunyan's pilgrim into the deep waters of Baptist faith, the works of Benjamin Keach (1640–1704) convey a more comprehensive use of this verse. While a doctrinal understanding of 1 Corinthians 15:55 may be codified in the Baptist confession, Keach gives the practical reading common to Baptists at this time and for the foreseeable future, as well as application for handling the subject of death. His application draws the reader to acknowledge

God's providence in death and dying. Death will indeed alter the condition of the body but it cannot annihilate the body. Though the believer will face the death of the body, it is truly the death of mortality that occurs, for though the body "be dissolved to dust, yet it shall not be lost, it shall rise to life again. Death cannot dissolve or break that blessed union there is between Jesus Christ and believers."[4] Death occurs according to providence, not by any power within itself. Keach explains through these verses that the soul will in fact separate from the body, but this is according to the work of God in purifying his people, and in order for the saints to join in the triumph of Christ's resurrection as participants by union.

If God does not pass a sentence of judgment upon the believer, then death has no power to do so. Keach writes, "Death has not power to cast into hell . . . it is sin that casts a person to hell," and this by the condemnation of God. As Keach rightly commits death into the providential hands of God, he assures his readers, any fear of death is uncalled for because God is the one in power. Fear detracts from the providence of God during and in death, because it confuses the grand promise of union in Christ. A fear and despair of death hinders from the joy and peace that Christians have steadfastly in Christ. By death Christians are delivered from the imprisonment of this corrupt world and from the bondage of sin. Its entire purpose to send sinners into judgment and guilt has now been circumvented; saints look to death as the means to glory in the resurrected life.[5] What Satan meant for ruin, Christ has orchestrated for glory (Gen. 50:20).

Keach likewise unpacks numerous other doctrines bound up in this verse. He explains that Christ's prophetic office is fulfilled in this verse as a triumph against the devil's power over Christians. Calling attention to 2 Timothy 1:10 he notes this to be prophetic of Christ on the day of resurrection for believers, which states of the saints' calling that it "is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."[6] Anne Dutton (1692–1765) takes this prophetic office of Christ one step further, as she sees the verse to connect with Isaiah 25:8, wherein Christ will swallow up death entirely on the day of resurrection. However, Dutton contends that the verse is both prophetic for the final resurrection, and useful for the exercise of faith in the Christian's present sanctification. She declares that the saints "shall sing in vision [at their final resurrection] as they once sang by faith," which is the exercise of holiness and assurance by their union with Christ in this life.[7]

Like Keach, Benjamin Wallin (1711–1782) "humbly conceives" that the context of Hosea 13:14[8] is prophetic of those in union with Christ and is proven so by 1 Corinthians 15:55: that "the faithful, in all ages, died in the expectation of being raised again."[9] Wallin, contends that the spirits of the dead saints are now in union with Christ and in perfect holiness, as they await their bodies to "rise to a blessed immortality."[10] God's providence over death is seen through

Hosea's promise that the Lord has complete power over death and the grave, and will not forsake his promise to his people based on this union with the headship of Christ. The backdrop of early Baptist tradition provided thus far contends that this verse, properly interpreted, uniquely describes the believer's union with Christ and encouragement for the present life, that God's providential hand is yet with his people now and will be forevermore.

## A Promise of Life for Now

John Gill (1697–1771) makes similar connections between 2 Timothy 1:10 and Hosea 13:14 as pointing to both Christ's prophetic and kingly office by which he conquered death and brought to life immortality for his glory.[11] While there is providence working in death to the glory of God, such providential means point through death to a promise of eternal life. Gill takes these verses and proceeds to point to the first witnesses of the empty tomb, the first true resurrection. He recalls, "go and see the place where their Lord lay"; the believer is called to remember by the empty tomb that the saints rise in union with him there where death was defeated.[12] Christ is king over the conquered enemy Death; that is, accusation and condemnation.[13]

The promise of life now and forevermore is entirely based on Christ's work. The resurrection of death and the grave is represented in Christ and his elect, just as Christ is the head of the body, his church.[14] As Christ is the head, all those who are members of his body, the elect before the foundations of the world, are united with him in death, resurrection, perseverance, and in spiritual unity forevermore.[15] Gill expounds on Keach's use of Hosea; as a bee without a stinger is just a bumbling harmless play-thing of an animal, so is death to those in Christ—they laugh and dance around the bee knowing it cannot nor will it ever be anything harmful. As Bunyan's pilgrim sang at the beginning of the Baptist tradition, so the interpretation of Christians singing this verse remains an integral aspect of continuing Baptist thought.

## A Song for Christians Now and Forevermore

God is sovereign in death as well as in the promised new life, but the Baptist tradition does not stop at heady doctrine. The saints must understand the application of this new life now and in future glory. Those saints who have passed through this life are now present with the Lord and enjoying holiness and refreshment, while they await the resurrection.[16] Carrying forward the Confession, the dead in Christ are not in a state of insensibility; sleep is only the bodily term for death, but the soul remains alive as it is immaterial and needs no rest.[17] Moving further, Gill points out the resurrection is indeed of the same body that "fell asleep." The spiritual body with flesh and bones is not left as a person is turned into a spirit or receives a spiritual body alone, but the "self-same" resurrected body which had fallen asleep will arise to "subsist as spirits do, without

need of food."[18] The saints will "be fitted for spiritual employments and converse with spiritual objects" while yet flesh and blood; by this they experience the glory of "the whole man" through new enjoyments, both "intellectual and corporal."[19]

At the Millennial reign of Christ, the saints will be raised to life and sing this verse as they have dominion over the sin and corruption of the world, and see Christ's victory over death through their immortal bodies—they are raised as Christ was raised, his soul went to the Father in paradise, then came back into his body to greater glory through his resurrection.[20] Gill is silent on the issue of Christ descending into Hades as extrapolated from this verse, but rather articulates Christ's death on the cross and his immediate ascension to paradise along with the other crucified confessor. So, Gill articulates, there is a liberty in the sons of God, where there is an exercise of faith in the face of death.[21] Believers can sing at the prospect of death rather than fear it; choosing it to be a better thing to depart and be with Christ and experience the glorious freedom of incorruptible bodies. Therefore, the saints in Christ, both in death and resurrection, have consolation in the face of mortality.

### *Booth's Consolation in Death*

Abraham Booth (1734–1806) preached through this verse on September 14, 1772, for a 21-year-old woman who died of small-pox. Through this sermon, Booth provides a portrait of the dying Christian and the consolation both of the dying believer and those in mourning, wherein they all may find both peace and fortitude because of the glorious triumph Christ has provided. Booth is most concerned with the assurance of Christians now, and the glory they will necessarily taste when they find death defeated on their behalf. "Death . . . when possessed of his sting, is no other than the minister of Divine Justice, to lay the delinquent under an arrest, and to drag him to prison and judgment."[22] Booth examines both Death and Grave as a humiliating pair. The sting of death is guilt.[23] The change in resurrection frees us through our mortal death from the plague of the heart.[24] Booth, as from Gill, strongly connects Hosea 13:14, noting that Jehovah has firmly decreed that death shall be destroyed. Booth lastly gives these words to us as a song:

> The Christians triumph over his vanquished foes. His triumph is thus expressed . . . Here we behold the saint, with death full in his view, and looking into his grave. He sees the monster approach, and feels his cold embrace. The grave lies open before him, and he finds himself ready to take up his lodging in it . . . Does he tremble with fear, or start back with horror? No; he is bold as a lion, and firm as a rock . . . He takes a leisurely survey of death, and his language breathes defiance. With heart-felt joy he loudly exclaims; "O Death, thou once formidable name! . . . Thy haggard form I plainly discern; but where, where is thy sting? . . . for, behold! Thy sting is entirely and eternally gone. Jesus, the glorious victor, has plucked it from thee."[25]

The entirety of Booth's dialogue is worthy of print. Here he acknowledges that fear of the grave is inseparable from our mortal state. It is a solemn and important event. Yet, along with Keach, this fear is to be met with fortitude and, by the mercy of God, should diminish in the spiritual life. Fear, for the Christian, is replaced by assurance as the believer fixates on the victory won by Christ.

### *A Future Song of Victory*

Indeed, the Baptist assurance is compelled because of who hold the keys of death. John Ryland Jr. (1753–1825) explains that 1 Corinthians 15 is related entirely to the work of Christ, in the satisfaction promised in 2 Timothy 1:10 just as Keach commented.[26] Christ holds the keys to death and Hades (Rev. 1:18) warranted him by his satisfying the wrath of God for the elect. Ryland continues the tradition of Gill who connected the keys to those used in Revelation 20:1; here, the angel is none other than Christ who binds the beast of death and accusation, just as he simultaneously opens the grave by his sovereign power.[27] Guilt, sin, death, and Satan are the enemies under his feet (1 Cor. 15:25). Henry Holcombe (1762–1824) reminded his church, as the saints rise to meet the key-holder, "then, 'O grave, where is thy victory?' shall burst from millions of enraptured and harmonious tongues."[28] Truly this verse is sung for Christ's work already accomplished for his saints in glory.

### *A Present Song of Sanctification*

However, this song is not only meant for the resurrection, but is useful for the church in this life. While future glory is an essential doctrine, there is a beautiful precedent set in Baptist tradition for the use of this verse as a present song of sanctification. Samuel Pearce (1766–1799) eloquently regards this verse to be a salve for his own immediate afflictions. By what he deems to be godly suffering in this life, death no longer has a sting to him. He takes it to be a present truth not a future hope. "I feel quite weaned from earth, and all things in it. Death has lost his sting, the grave his horrors."[29] And so the song offers a necessary fortitude by recognizing God's providence as well as his mercy over repentant sinners in handling the burdens of the depraved world.

### *A Song of Mercy in this Life*

Samuel Stillman (1737–1807) positioned this verse as a description of God's attribute of mercy. Such mercy is intended for the present sanctification of the believer as they look forward to their final destination. He preaches, "Through divine mercy, how stingless death!"[30] Stillman saw in this verse those dead saints asleep until the resurrection, instantaneously glorified along with the living. Stillman was quick to subordinate his interpretation in accordance with John Gill's

exposition and theological works. He even blessed God for Gill and felt the London Baptist far "better qualified to unfold the mysteries of the Gospel."[31] Stillman pushes the believer to acknowledge the grand resurrection of the dead, wherein the resurrected body will be changed, "it shall be spiritual and glorious, and thus fit to be re-united to the soul, and in a complete person enter into the joy of the Lord."[32] His language continues to be imprecise in this measure, whether a soul is sensible in death: he states "They who sleep are insensible . . . so it is with the dead . . . so it is with the saints who die."[33] Though he is imprecise in qualifying his statements regarding a spiritual body, we can understand through a larger breadth of his preaching that he indeed believed in a physical resurrection. He uses the term sleep repeatedly to signify that the dead in Christ sleep as in a rest and go into this rest with anticipation of an everlasting resurrection. Rest may likely be his word for the saints living now in paradise.

Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) positions this verse as serving two purposes, the present sanctification and the future glorification of those in Christ. Again, Christians are observed literally "standing on their graves, looking the conquered enemy in the face, and exclaiming" this Corinthian verse. Fuller applies the look toward mercy in this life by which, "we shall be reconciled to death, even before we meet it." Because believers know Christ's resurrection they can rest with hope at the prospect of their own bodily decay.[34] The assurance of this little song is both to satisfy the saints spiritual assurance, and to bolster the work of sanctification.

## A Salve for Sin

This verse is used in the present life not only for mercy but as a means for meditation on sin and for pursuit of holiness. Pastors John Chin (1773–1834)[35] and John Foster (1770–1843)[36] both utilized this verse on their deathbeds as a way of leaning on mercy and gathering fortitude to face the grave; they repeated the verse for friends, family, and servants shortly before passing this life. Yet there was more at work than a mercy for the deathbed.

In Foster's second recorded letter from the fall of 1824, he writes to Miss Sarah Saunders that our guilt renders us in disharmony with God, and our sin causes dread to go before him or even to grow in affections of him (as observed in 1 Cor. 15:56). This mentality is why we fear death and do all we can to not think about it. But those who can sing with Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:55 are those who have taken account of sin—comprehending the depth and depravity of sin. The chorus is comprised of those who have by repentance experienced the assurance of victory, and are tasting the fruit of faithful obedience through this song.

As Fuller gravitated toward a sanctifying purpose in the verse, Foster does the same. Looking at what would bring a Christian to fear death, Foster notes that those leaning on the mercy of Christ and stirred by affections for him would have no need to fear. However, those who wince

more than naturally at the idea of death are those who subconsciously recognize they stand under wrath. He explains, even those who have "virtuous habits" and a "favorable situation" may care little to examine sinfulness and thus may not be so near God as to rejoice at the contemplations of death. Foster treats this verse as an expectation, a spiritual goal to grow toward singing at the confrontation of death. The grand evil of sin "is the deficiency of the heart towards God and spiritual and eternal interests." Desiring communion with God finds its supreme goal in death and entering his glory.[37] Fear subsides in the Christian as the song is sung because there is abundant hope that the mortal flesh passes the Christian into immortality.

### *A Verse-sized Treatise on Immortal Flesh*

Death is, for the Christian, a final mortification that leads to the death of the depraved and carnal mind. When the mortal is dead, the saints are finally free in immortality. In this way, James Petigru Boyce (1827–1888) wrote that death is stingless in the Christian's present life.[38] Death is the only means through which we are redeemed from the paradoxical situation of Romans 7. Death is truly the punishment of sin, and as such it is the final glory of sanctification, as Foster likewise described. Here in death the Christian finds perfect mortification of sin and depravity, and in death there is the perfect sanctification of the body and soul for glory. Boyce explains through this verse (much as the early Baptist Confession understood), the intermediate state is where the soul remains ("as it may have location without occupying space") until it is received into its body for resurrection. A human soul without a body is an imperfect life; to be man is to consist of both body and soul.[39] The sting of death is also one of a spiritual sense; therefore, to be raised perfectly is to sing of the victory of the unity of immortal body and soul. Christians seek immortal flesh and, in doing so, fight off temptation so to have a foretaste of heaven's joys. Boyce longed to sing this verse as a salve for sin with immortal expectations, and by such expectations to quell mortal desire.

### *A Verse-sized Treatise on Mortification*

The crushing of mortal desires is mortification, and victory over death in this life is described with such a word. Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892), exposes death as a monster with great power over believers—he is a dragon the Christian cannot slay.[40] Yet, the sting of death is cut off and therefore, though the Christian will inevitably meet death, there is no longer a lasting effect following death. The sting is sin, and the Christian may now look in retrospect as to the sting disarmed in his past life, but also must now look to a present life without sin, to live as though sin is truly defeated in this life—this through mortifying sin and growing in holiness. Just as Foster noted prior, through the exercise of mortification the Christian will find peace in meeting death. The pilgrim will know this peace by experiencing the assurance and joy of seeing death merely as the natural destruction of the mortal life, but the door of resurrection.

## Conclusion

However similar or dissimilar this verse is interpreted within Baptist sources, there is abundant evidence of cohesion in terms of the Particular Baptist tradition. Though there is a richness and wealth within this verse available from many other traditions, it behooves Baptists today to collect, utilize, and scrutinize our own tradition. Through this survey, it is clear there is much to be discovered in the writings of this tradition, not only as pertains to 1 Corinthians 15:55, but throughout the canon of Scripture. If this verse can provide a thorough examination of chief doctrine like union with Christ and assurance of faith, as well as practical and compassionate responses to fear and suffering, what might a survey of Baptist tradition offer concerning other far more controversial passages?

Baptists have a long tradition for the use of this verse. While it is remarkable to count the sources, it is likewise worth noting the development through two-hundred years, and that such development rooted in Scripture and doctrine does not deviate as one might expect. The overarching tradition speaks to the singing of the saints at the approach of death and at the resurrection, chiefly to remember that we are in harmony with millions of Christians as we sing over the grave of our victory in Jesus. Though we pass as pilgrims through the river of death, in singing this verse we are no longer deaf to the sound of the trumpet proclaiming our victory in Christ. What a remarkable word of promise, to sing now and forevermore, "How stingless death!"

---

### BIBLIOGRAPHY:


Booth, Abraham. *The Christian Triumph: A Sermon occasioned by the Death of Miss Ann William.* 2nd Edition. London: E. & C. Dilly, 1773.

Boyce, James Petigru. *Abstract of Systematic Theology.* 1977. Reprint, Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2006.

Boyce, James Petigru. *Selected Writings.* Edited by Timothy George. Nashville, TN: Broadman,1989.

Bunyan, John. *The Pilgrim's Progress from this World to that which is to Come, The Second Part.* London: Nath. Ponder, 1684.

Dutton, Anne. *Letters on Spiritual Subjects, and Divers Occasions; Sent to Relations and Friends.* London: J. Hart, 1748.

Foster, John. *The Life and Correspondence of John Foster. Volume 2.* Edited by John E. Ryland. London: Jackson and Walford, 1846.

Fuller, Andrew. *Life of Rev. Samuel Pearce of Birmingham.* London: Religious Tract Society, 1799.

Fuller, Andrew. *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller.* Volume 1. Edited by Andrew Gunton Fuller. Philadelphia, PA: American Tract Society, 1831.

Gill, John. *The Doctrine of the Saints Final Perseverance, Asserted and Vindicated: In Answer to a late Pamphlet, called, Serious Thoughts, On that Subject*. London: George Keith, 1752.

Gill, John. *The Glorious State of the Saints in Heaven: A Sermon Preached to the Society which Support the Wednesday Evening's Lecture in Cannon-Street*, London, December 31st, 1755.

London: George Keith, 1756. Gill, John. *A Body of Doctrinal Divinity; or, A System of Evangelical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures in Two Volumes*. London: George Keith, 1769.

Holcombe, Henry. *A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of R. Charles Bealer.* Charleston, SC: Markland & McIver, 1793.

Keach, Benjamin. *A Summons to the Grave, the Necessity of a Timely Preparation for Death; Demonstrated in a Sermon Preached as the Funeral of …Mr. John Norcot, March 24, 1676.* London: Ben. Harris, 1676.

Keach, Benjamin. Tropologia: *A Key to Open Scripture Metaphors, in Four Books.* Ireland: William Hill Collingbridge, 1858.

Pritchard, George. *Memoir of the Rev. John Chin, more than thirty years pastor of the Baptist church in Lion Street, Walworth.* London: George Wightman, 1840.

Rippon, John. *Life and Writings of the Rev. John Gill, D.D. 1838.* Reprint, Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 2006.

Ryland, John Jr. *Christ Manifested and Satan Frustrated. A Sermon Preached at the Meeting-House in College-Lane, Northampton.* Northampton: Thomas Dicey and Co., 1782.

Spurgeon, Charles. *Sermons of Rev. C.H. Spurgeon of London.* Volume 1. New York: Robert Carter, & Bros., 1883.

Stillman, Samuel. *Select Sermons on Doctrinal and Practical Subjects.* Boston: Manning & Loring, 1808.

Waldron, Samuel E. *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith.* 5th Edition. Wyoming, MI: Evangelical Press, 2016.

Wallin, Benjamin. *A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of Mr. Thomas Wildman, who departed this Life,* June 25, 1754. London: George Keith, 1754.

## NOTES:

[1] John Bunyan, The Pilgrim's Progress from this World to that which is to Come, The Second Part (London: Nath. Ponder, 1684), 202. "When the day that he must go hence, was come, many accompanied him to the River side, into which, as he went, he said, 'Death, where is thy Sting?' And as he went down deeper, he said, 'Grave, where is thy Victory?' So he passed over, and all the Trumpets sounded for him on the other side."

[2] See chapter 31, paragraphs 1–3,

[3] Samuel E. Waldron, A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, 5th ed. (Wyoming, MI: Evangelical Press, 2016), 449–450.

[4] Benjamin Keach, A Summons to the Grave, the Necessity of a Timely Preparation for Death; Demonstrated in a Sermon Preached as the Funeral of…Mr. John Norcot, March 24, 1676 (London: Ben. Harris, 1676), 58–63.

[5] Keach, A Summons to the Grave, 60.

[6] Benjamin Keach, Tropologia: A Key to Open Scripture Metaphors, in Four Books (Ireland: William Hill Collingbridge, 1858), 66.

[7] Anne Dutton, "Letter LXXIII" in Letters on Spiritual Subjects, and Divers Occasions; Sent to Relations and Friends (London: J. Hart, 1748), 257.

[8] Hosea 13:14, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes."

[9] Benjamin Wallin, A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of Mr. Thomas Wildman, who departed this Life, June 25, 1754 (London: George Keith, 1754), 27–28.

[10] Wallin, A Sermon Occasioned … Thomas Wildman, 32.

[11] Gill, A Body of Doctrinal Divinity, II.659.

[12] John Gill, A Body of Doctrinal Divinity; or, A System of Evangelical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures in Two Volumes (London: George Keith, 1769), II.650–51.

[13] Gill, A Body of Doctrinal Divinity, II.707

[14] Gill, A Body of Doctrinal Divinity, I.326–27.

[15] John Gill, The Doctrine of the Saints Final Perseverance, Asserted and Vindicated: In Answer to a late Pamphlet, called, Serious Thoughts, On that Subject (London: G. Keith and J. Robinson, 1752), 51–52.

[16] Gill, A Body of Doctrinal Divinity, II.940–41.

[17] Gill, A Body of Doctrinal Divinity, II.944, 946.

[18] John Gill, The Glorious State of the Saints in Heaven: A Sermon Preached to the Society which Support the Wednesday Evening's Lecture in Cannon-Street, London. December 31st, 1755 (London: 1756), 33.

[19] Gill, The Glorious Sate of the Saints in Heaven, 33–34.

[20] Gill, A Body of Doctrinal Divinity, II.1031, 1046.

[21] Gill, A Body of Doctrinal Divinity, II.834.

[22] Abraham Booth, The Christian Triumph: A Sermon occasioned by the Death of Miss Ann William, 2nd ed. (London: E. & C. Dilly, 1773), 6.

[23] Booth, The Christian Triumph, 12.

[24] Booth, The Christian Triumph, 13–14, 16.

[25] Booth, The Christian Triumph, 22–24.

[26] John Ryland, Jr., Christ Manifested and Satan Frustrated. A Sermon Preached at The Meeting-House in College-Lane, Northampton (Northampton: Thomas Dicey and Co., 1782), 45, 49.

[27] Gill, A Body of Doctrinal Divinity, II.977, 1013.

[28] Henry Holcombe, A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of R. Charles Bealer (Charleston: Markland & McIver, 1793), 5. Holcombe is noted for his connection with Adoniram Judson and controversy involving the American Baptist Home Missionary Society. He was also a staunch defender of the doctrines of grace among American Baptists, see A sermon, containing a brief illustration and defence of the doctrines commonly called Calvinistic; Preached before the Charleston Association of Baptist Churches (Charleston, SC: Markland & McIver, 1793).

[29] Andrew Fuller, Life of the Rev. Samuel Pearce of Birmingham (London: Religious Tract Society, 1799), 86.

[30] Samuel Stillman, Select Sermons on Doctrinal and Practical Subjects (Boston: Manning and Loring, 1808), 210. Sermon delivered November 30, 1806, "Sermon XIV: The Resurrection, and Change of the Vile Body."

[31] John Rippon, Life and Writings of the Rev. John Gill, D.D. (1838; repr., Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 2006), 129–30.

[32] Stillman, Select Sermons, 292.

[33] Stillman, Select Sermons, 291.

[34] Andrew Fuller, "Principles and Prospects of a Servant of Christ," in The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller, vol. I, ed. Andrew Gunton Fuller (Philadelphia, PA: American Tract Society, 1831), 348. See A Sermon Delivered at the Funeral of the Rev. John Sutcliff, of Olney, June 28, 1814.

[35] George Pritchard, Memoir of the Rev. John Chin, more than thirty years pastor of the Baptist church in Lion Street, Walworth (London: George Wightman, 1840), 125–126.

[36] J.E. Ryland, The Life and Correspondence of John Foster, vol. II (London: Jackson and Walford, 1846), 357.

[37] John Foster, "Letter II," in The Life and Correspondence of John Foster, ed. J.E. Ryland, 542–43.

[38] James Petigru Boyce, Selected Writings, ed. Timothy George (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1989), 135–136. This essay is extracted from Boyce's funeral sermon for Basil Manly, Sr. (1798–1868).

[39] James Petigru Boyce, Abstract of Systematic Theology (1977; repr., Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2006), 447.

[40] Charles Spurgeon, "Sermon XIV: Thoughts on the Last Battle," in Sermons of Rev. C.H. Spurgeon of London, vol. 1 (New York: Robert Carter & Bros., 1883), 274–295.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Christopher Ellis Osterbrock (DEdMin. in Biblical Spirituality, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; PhD Student in Historical Theology, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary) is senior pastor of First Baptist Church of Wellsboro, PA. He is author of What is Saving Faith? (March, 2022), as well as editor of several reprints.

Craig Biehl

# Are God's Justice and Mercy Incompatible?

In the book, The Impossibility of God,[1] the editors present five categories of arguments that they claim disprove God's existence. One such claim asserts that "a contradiction between two or more of God's attributes" renders God impossible, as follows:

1. If God exists, then the attributes of God are consistent with one another.

2. Some attributes of God are not consistent with one another.

3. Therefore, God does not and cannot exist.[2]

For instance, Theodore M. Drange argues that God as both an "all-just" and "all-merciful" judge cannot exist. An all-just judge will always "treat every offender with exactly the severity" deserved, while an all-merciful judge "treats every offender with less severity" than deserved. And as both cannot be true, God cannot exist.[3] Interestingly, the Bible presents the same problem and Drange has rightly identified it. In this puzzle we see the fundamental problem facing people under God's righteous condemnation. How can God, like a corrupt judge that ignores the law and leaves the guilty unpunished, remain righteous if He ignores the demands of His justice to have mercy on sinners?

Essential to a right approach to all difficult theological and philosophical issues, the answer to this vital question requires understanding the relationship of God to mankind from the

beginning, including our proper responsibility to Him as our creator. Broadly, God created everything and everyone. From God we have life and every good thing, apart from Him we have nothing. To Him we owe all things, while He owes us nothing. And as God is infinitely excellent, we should treat Him as His dignity deserves. Thus, we read, "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deut. 6:4-5 NASB). Christ repeated the mandate as the "greatest" commandment (Matt. 22:37, Mark 12:30, Luke 10:27). The Shema, then, states the minimum we owe God as our glorious creator, sustainer, and giver of every blessing.

Sin, however, fails to treat God as He deserves, either by ignoring what He has told us to do, or by doing what He has told us not to do. The penalty for sin includes physical and spiritual death. "The soul who sins will die" (Ez. 18:4). "For the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die'" (Gen. 2:16-17). When Adam and Eve sinned, they immediately died spiritually when their loving communion with God was shattered and He became their judge and adversary. They hid themselves in shame from the One they once loved and enjoyed. Physical death, that mortal enemy and curse, came later and has afflicted humanity ever since. "Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin" (Rom. 5:12).

Moreover, neither God's holy dignity and power, nor the nature and requirements of His justice have changed. Scripture presents God as a righteous judge, whose strict justice applies to everyone always, without respect to persons. "Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all" (Jam. 2:10). "But the LORD abides forever; He has established His throne for judgment, And He will judge the world in righteousness; He will execute judgment for the peoples with equity" (Ps. 9:7-8). The standard for Adam and Eve applies to all people. And while Christ fulfilled the Mosaic Law, He also lived the perfect life of honor and obedience eternally owed to God. The moral duty of all people—as articulated in the Shema and repeated by Christ—never ends. People owe God perfect love and obedience forever.

At the same time, Scripture teems with descriptions of God's mercy to people of His choosing. For instance, "What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion'" (Rom. 9:14-15). Again, "He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us" (Ps. 103:10-12). Perfect justice and mercy even appear in the same verse: "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to

anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished" (Ex. 34:6-7).

But how can this be? Granted, God is free to do as He wills, when He wills, to whom He wills, and no finite and fallen creature can tell Him otherwise. "'Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Let him who reproves God answer it.' Then Job answered the LORD and said, 'Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to Thee?'" (Job 40:2-4). Nonetheless, God cannot violate His flawless character, including His perfect justice. Should He pervert justice in a single case, He would cease to be perfect and thus cease to be God. Moreover, if He applied His strict justice without exception, He could be merciful to no one. After all, Adam and Eve were cast from paradise for one sin. Thus, the argument that an all-just and all-merciful God cannot exist would seem to have merit. It would also appear that Scripture has created an unsolvable dilemma, calling into question its own coherence and trustworthiness, and the existence of the God it proclaims. But does it?

In Christ's encounter with the rich young ruler, He used the gentleman's refusal to give up his wealth to illustrate how no one who loves anything more than Christ can enter into heaven. When Jesus declared, "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:24), the disciples understood the indictment and asked, "then who can be saved?" Indeed, "If Thou, LORD, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?" (Ps. 130:3). "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). "There is none righteous, not even one" (Rom 3:10). "There is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins" (Eccl. 7:20). "Who can say, 'I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin?'" (Prov. 20:9). All stand guilty before God and worthy of condemnation.

From the perspective of the accused, the situation was bleak. God will never relax the demands of His justice to grant mercy—the penalty for sin must be paid. Yet, Christ did not leave His disciples in despair, adding,iH "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God" (Mark 10:27; cf. Matt. 19:26, Luke 18:27). God Himself would become one of us. God Himself would take our place and satisfy the perfect obedience required by His justice. And God Himself would pay the just penalty we deserve for our disobedience and contempt. "He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:17).

Long before the earthly ministry of Christ as High Priest, the prophet Isaiah predicted this saving work:

> *For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face, He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.* (Isa. 53:2-6).

And further:

> *By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living, For the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due? His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth. But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities.* (Isa. 53:8-11).

Moreover, the entire sacrificial system of the Jewish Tabernacle and Temple foreshadowed God's solution to the dilemma of justice and mercy in saving sinners, including the provision of a priestly mediator between God and man (in particular, the high priest who entered the Holy of Holies once a year with the blood of the sacrifice to cover the sins of Israel); the practice of substitution (a lamb for a man); and sacrifice for sin (the death of a substitute in the place of the sinner). Thus, John the Baptist proclaimed at his first sight of Jesus, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Christ's sinless life met the requirements of God's strict justice in loving God with all His "heart, soul, and might," giving God the Father His due as the supremely excellent creator and sustainer of all. On the cross He suffered infinite wrath in our place, paying the penalty for our sin by His agony and death.

As a man, Christ was the perfect substitute for mankind. As God and man, He was the perfect mediator between God and man. And as God, His suffering and death paid an infinite penalty for the sin of mankind. This He did once for all time, never to be repeated.

> *By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right*

> *hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified* (Heb. 10:10-14).

In His cry from the cross, "It is finished!" (John 19:30), Christ proclaimed the successful accomplishment of God's plan of the ages, the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning His redeeming work, and the reality of the shadows displayed in the Tabernacle and Temple ceremonies—the satisfaction of God's justice for the salvation of souls. The Lamb of God came not to abolish the standard of God's perfect justice. He came to satisfy its requirements on behalf of sinners:

> *Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished* (Matt. 5:17-18).

How, then, do the benefits of Christ's magnificent work become the possession of the sinner? By grace through faith in Christ, alone, we are saved from the condemnation of our sin.

> *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him* (John 3:16-17).

But how does faith save sinners? Does the act of believing constitute a good work of such merit that it meets the demands of God's justice? Does God accept faith in the place of the requirements of His law? If Christ, alone, satisfied the requirements for forgiveness of sin and the obtaining of eternal life, how does faith save?

We know that none are saved by their own good works, for "by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight" (Rom. 3:20), and "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus…since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified" (Gal. 2:16). Our good works cannot earn God's favor. Salvation is by grace. Moreover, faith, of itself, cannot satisfy the standard of God's strict justice—Christ, alone, met the requirement of sinless obedience and payment of the penalty for our disobedience. How, then, does faith save us if Christ met the standard of God's righteous justice and we remain sinful and guilty?

Saving faith constitutes the open, empty, and unworthy hands that accept the free gift of Christ's satisfaction of God's justice on our behalf. Faith denies any merit of our own to earn acceptance by God as it receives the merit earned for us by Christ. As in marriage the bride and groom are legally united as one, so saving faith unites the believer and Christ in a bond of love. When the

bride says, "I do," all that belongs to him becomes hers. And when the bridegroom says, "I do," all that belongs to her becomes his. (Granted, most of his junk gets thrown out in the process, but I digress.) In the same way, faith unites to Christ such that the merits of what He accomplished for salvation become the possession of the believer. In a "great exchange," our sins were credited to Christ when He suffered and died on the cross, so His righteousness in meeting the demands of God's justice on our behalf is credited to us when we embrace Him by faith. By faith the believer is "covered in the righteousness of Christ." "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2Cor. 5:21). "For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:17). "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Rom. 10:4). In this way, salvation by faith upholds God's righteous justice. "Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law" (Rom 3:31). The obligation to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and might remains unchanged. Christ, in perfect righteousness, performed it in our place. Again, Isaiah predicted this:

> *I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, My soul will exult in my God; For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels* (Isa. 61:10).

Sadly, though the "Light of the World" satisfied God's justice and offers forgiveness of sin and eternal life to all who would receive Him as Savior, many reject the precious gift:

> *There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God* (John 1:9-13).

Indeed, "the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it" (Matt. 7:14). Why?

> *And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed* (John 3:19-20).

For the religious deniers of Christ as God and Savior, the principle that our best behavior or merits cannot meet God's standard of justice or earn His favor, pose an obstacle to faith in Christ. For atheists and the irreligious, the duty to bow to God's sovereign authority asks too

much, or is "contrary to human dignity," as Kant would have it. In the end, the battle rages between two wills: God's will in and through Christ, or our own.

In drawing this article to a close, we have in the justice as contrary to mercy objection to the God of the Bible an example of what besets the best of atheistic arguments. From a human perspective, God's justice and mercy present an unsolvable problem. Yet God, who created and sustains all things, who transcends what He has made, who determines the rules of reality and defines the nature of justice and mercy, has solved the problem according to His wisdom. And even if God clearly meets the demands of our limited grasp of logic, God's solution remains foolish and unacceptable to many.

For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.' Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe (1 Cor. 1:18-21).

And while God's ways need not be understood in order to be true, the "unsolvable," from our narrow perspective, does not constitute a problem for God. He remains just in His mercy on sinners through faith in Christ, who satisfied for us the claims of His justice. And regardless, God is sovereign, answers to no one, and remains under no obligation to have mercy on a single soul, especially those who scorn the person and work of Christ—who suffered infinite wrath to purchase endless and immeasurable happiness for the unworthy. Neither must God have mercy on those who deny the clear display of His genius, power, and goodness in creation and every blessing, or who reject His law written on their heart. In the end, the penalty for sin will be paid, either vicariously in Christ or personally without Christ, while His free offer of mercy remains for all who would seek Him. "For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" (Heb. 2:2-3).

Adapted from Craig Biehl, Too Small: Why Atheists Can't Know What They Say They Know. Forthcoming, Tulip Publishing, 2023.

## NOTES:

[1] Michael Martin and Ricki Monnier, eds., The Impossibility of God (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2003).

[2] Introduction to "Multiple Attributes Disproofs of the Existence of God," in The Impossibility of God, 181.

[3] Theodore M. Drange, "Incompatible-Properties Arguments: A Survey," The Impossibility of God, 195-6.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Craig Biehl writes and teaches on various theological topics. He launched Pilgrim's Rock to develop material to boost the believers' joy, comfort, and faith in Christ and Scripture. Craig received his AB in economics from Cal Berkeley, MBA from UCLA Anderson School of Management, ThM from Dallas Theological Seminary, and PhD in Systematic Theology from Westminster Theological Seminary.

Robert Gonzales Jr.

# The Saving Design of God's Common Grace

*This article was originally posted in Issue 116 of the Founders Journal.*

Theologians frequently distinguish two species of divine grace in the Scriptures: saving grace and common grace. God directs the former particularly to the elect; God showers the latter indiscriminately on all men in general. Saving grace is, as its designation suggests, efficacious in effecting the redemption of those to whom it is given. Common grace, on the other hand, does not guarantee the salvation of its recipients. Nevertheless, God's common grace is saving in its design. That is, God sincerely intends the kindness and patience he shows to all sinners (whether elect or non-elect) to lead them unto saving repentance. The apostle Paul underscores this biblical truth in Romans 2:4.

Before we demonstrate our thesis concerning the teaching of Romans 2:4, we believe it would be helpful to read the verse in its larger context:

> *Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. Do you suppose, O man–you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself–that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will*

*be revealed* (Rom 2:1-5, ESV).

From this passage (especially verse 4), we'll identify the recipients, the nature, and the design of God's common grace.

## The Recipients of God's Common Grace

Precisely whom is Paul addressing in Romans 2:1-5?

### *The "Moralist" whether Jew or Gentile*

The majority of commentators believe Paul has transitioned from indicting pagan Gentiles in Romans 1:18-32 to condemning self-righteous Jews in 2:1ff.[i] There are good reasons, however, to interpret the scope of Paul's indictment as inclusive of any moralist, whether Jew or Gentile.[ii]

### *The Sinfully Self-Righteous Person*

Not only is Paul addressing the self-confessed "moralist." He seems to have in view the person who not only prides himself in his assumed "superior" ethical mores, but also makes it his business to judge and condemn others less outwardly decent or religious. This is the kind of judgmentalism Jesus warned against in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 7:1-5). It's epitomized in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican where the former, looking condescendingly on the latter, has the audacity to pray,

God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get (Luke 18:11-12, ESV).

### *The Blind and Stubborn Reprobate*

Paul's characterization darkens as the passage progresses. This is not just a moralist who's got nothing better to do than to complain about the ills of the decadent society around him. Paul's diatribe is aimed at the man who shows contempt[iii] for the abundance of God's "kindness and forbearance and patience" of which he is a recipient. This contempt actually blinds him[iv] to the fact that such undeserved kindness has a benevolent design (2:4). And in this case, the blindness is the willful, sinful, and culpable variety.[v] Worse, it results in a stubborn impenitence that accrues, rather ironically for the moralist, a "treasury"[vi] of divine wrath and judgment (2:5).[vii]

## The Nature of God's Common Grace

The "common grace" in this passage is God's indiscriminate kindness shown to the undeserving or, better, ill-deserving. Paul describes this kindness using three nouns. The first, χρηστότητος, denotes the quality of beneficence. The second, ἀνοχῆς, signifies the quality of being forbearing or tolerant. It's used in Romans 3:26 to refer to God's postponement of judgment. The third, μακροθυμίας, refers to the quality of patience or long-suffering. Paul summarizes these ideas with the cognate adjective of the first noun, χρηστὸς, which is here used substantively–"God's kindness."

*Some Grace Saves*

Sometimes divine "kindness" is employed to signify a discriminate, salvific, and efficacious grace. For example, consider Paul's words to the church of Ephesus:

> But God, being rich in mercy (ἐλέει), because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ–by grace (χάριτί) you have been saved–and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace (χάριτος) in kindness (χρηστότητι) toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace (χάριτί) you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God (2:4-8).

Worth noting is that Paul portrays God's saving "kindness" (χρηστότης) as a species of "grace" (χάρις) and expression of "mercy" (ἔλεος). Moreover, we see a parallel in this text with Romans 2:4 in that both passages describe God's kindness or grace in lavish terms: here, "God being rich" (πλούσιος); there, "the riches (πλούτου) of his kindness."

Paul employs the same salvific kindness terminology in his letter to Titus:

> But when the goodness (χρηστότης) and loving kindness (φιλανθρωπία) of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy (ἔλεος), through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace (χάριτι), we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (3:4-7).

In this case χρηστότης ("goodness") and φιλανθρωπία ("loving-kindness") function as the more general terms of which God's saving ἔλεος ("mercy") and χάριτι ("grace") are species. And, like our text (Rom 2:4) and Ephesians 2 above, this divine kindness is extravagant: "this Spirit he poured out on us richly (πλουσίως) through Jesus Christ our Savior."

## Some Grace Does Not

Some Christians seem to believe that "grace" vocabulary, like that above, always and necessarily denotes God's efficacious and saving kindness to the ill-deserving. But this is simply not the case for several reasons.

First, the fact that the phrase "common grace" doesn't occur in the Bible does not mean the concept behind the phrase is absent. To assume that the absence of a special term or a technical phrase precludes the idea or notion conveyed by such a word or phrase is to commit a linguistic fallacy. As James Barr explains, "It is the sentence (and of course the still larger literary complex such as the complete speech or poem) which is the linguistic bearer of the usual theological statement, and not the word (the lexical unit) or the morphological and syntactical connection."[viii] For example, one will scour Genesis 3 in vain for such terms as "sin," "evil," "rebellion," "transgression," or "guilt." But it's obvious to most readers that the chapter is all about mankind's fall into sin. Similarly, the Scriptures teach that God is one nature and three persons. Thus, we may affirm the doctrine of the "Trinity" even though the term doesn't occur in the Bible. The same holds true for the phrase "common grace."

Second, and related to the point above, it's not the term "grace" by itself that denotes efficacious grace. Rather, the larger context in which the term occurs is what constrains the special (soteriological) signification. In general, the term "grace" denotes ideas like "favor," "goodwill," or "kindness." Only when the term is employed in contexts where God's regenerating, justifying, or sanctifying activity is in view does it convey the theological notion of divine saving grace to the ill-deserving. To assume that the English term or its Hebrew or Greek counterparts (see below) must always have a technical meaning in biblical discourse is, once again, linguistically fallacious. D. A. Carson calls this the terminus technicus fallacy in which "an interpreter falsely assumes that a word [e.g., "grace"] always has a certain technical meaning–a meaning derived either from a subset of the evidence or from the interpreter's personal systematic theology."[ix]

Third, even the Hebrew and Greek terms commonly translated as "grace" (Hebrew: חֵן [noun], חנן [verb]/Greek: χάρις [noun]; χαρίζω [verb]) do not always denote God's efficacious and saving kindness to the ill-deserving. When, for instance, Noah finds "grace (חֵן) in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen 6:8), he's not receiving God's saving grace as an ill-deserving sinner, but God's approval as a righteous saint (see Gen 6:10). In other words, there is a species of grace that's actually merited (cf. Gen 33:12-17; Prov 12:2). Such is what the Gospel writer Luke had in view when he tells us, "Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor (χάριτι) with God and man" (Luke 2:52). Obviously, divine saving grace to the ill-deserving doesn't fit this context. There are many other examples of non-soteriological usage.[x]

Fourth, the biblical terms translated "grace" belong to a larger semantic domain that includes words such as "mercy," "compassion," "patience," "long-suffering," and "kindness." Such terms may denote God's discriminate saving grace, or they can signify a more general idea like God's indiscriminate kindness. Psalm 145 seems to bring both kinds of divine grace into close relation. The psalmist highlights God's covenantal or special grace in verse 8 with an allusion to Yahweh's self-revelation in Exodus 34: "The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." Then, in the next verse, he places God's special grace under the umbrella of God's common grace: "The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made."[xi] The Greek term used to translate "all" in the LXX often signifies the entire world (Job 2:2; Isa 11:9; Nah 1:5), which nicely parallels the phrase "all that he has made." It seems then, there is a species of God's grace or kindness that is more general in scope.

Fifth, that the noun χρηστότητος ("kindness") and adjective χρηστὸς ("kind") can denote a non-salvific favor, that is, a general kindness, is shown by the fact that they are predicated of Christians. That is, believers are commanded to be kind and gracious to others (2 Cor 6:6; Gal 5:22; Col 3:12; Eph 4:32). One should note that the species of "kindness" enjoined of humans in these passages is represented as analogous to the kindness God has showed toward us in salvation, not necessarily in terms of efficacy but in terms of its general nature, i.e., a kind of favor that is benevolent and merciful in character. Note how Jesus enjoins his disciples to imitate God's common kindness by being gracious even toward their enemies:

> But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind (χρηστός) to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful (Luke 6:35-36, ESV).

Sixth, our text in Romans plainly refers to a species of divine grace or kindness that is not limited to the elect and that falls short of actually effecting the conversion of its recipients (see Rom 2:5). So we agree with William G. T. Shedd when he comments on Romans 2:4 and remarks, "The apostle is not speaking, here, of the effectual operation of special grace upon the human will, but only of common influences."[xii]

In summary, though the phrase "common grace" doesn't appear in the Bible, the concept of common grace does. Common grace refers to God's blessings on the human race that fall short of salvation from sin. Theologians usually classify these common expressions of divine kindness and benevolence as follows: (1) God's restraint of human sin and its effects, (2) God's bestowal of temporal blessings on humanity in general, and (3) God's endowment of unbelievers with knowledge and skills to benefit human society as a whole.[xiii] The goodwill, tolerance, and patience of Romans 2:4 would extend to all three of these dimensions of common grace. Yet

these indiscriminate blessings are not an end in themselves. God has an agenda.

## The Design of God's Common Grace

Why is God so amazingly good, tolerant of, and patient toward the self-righteous and self-sufficient reprobate who spends his life condemning others and commending himself? Before we identify the obvious reason, which the apostle Paul highlights, let's address two incorrect answers to the question.

### *To Assure the Sinner "All's Well"*

The first incorrect answer to the question is the one assumed by the impenitent moralist Paul is describing. Such a person interprets God's gracious providence as a sure sign that God is pleased with him. The fact God hasn't struck him dead with a bolt of lightning must mean God approves of him and that he has no need to fear. This kind of gross and groundless presumption characterized the Jewish nation who foolishly interpreted God's deferral of judgment as a certain sign that all was well (see Jeremiah 7).

But Paul exposes the folly of this presumptuous attitude and in no uncertain terms declares quite the opposite. The self-righteous moralist is just as much under God's condemnation as the depraved pagan. After all, all things are open before the eyes of whom we must give an account (Heb 4:13). Accordingly, the aim of God's common grace has not been to stoke the moralist's pride, to foster complacency, or to promote presumption. Rather, says Paul, God's goodness is aimed at the self-righteous moralist's repentance.

### *To Fatten the Sinner for Judgment*

Some, especially those of the ultra-Calvinist bent, insist on reading the text as if God's design in demonstrating kindness to the non-elect were nothing more than a means to aggravate their guilt and increase their punishment. Just as the farmer feeds and fattens the turkey for the chopping block, so God showers good things upon and withholds immediate judgment from the self-righteous sinner in order to make him "ripe" for damnation. It's as if God's only intention toward the non-elect can be malevolent; any beneficence, on God's part, is disallowed. For example, in a critical review of John Murray's The Free Offer of the Gospel, Matthew Winzer asserts,

> The reprobate are not considered merely as creatures when God dispenses his temporal benefits to them. They are "vessels of wrath fitted to destruction," and God is said to endure them "with much longsuffering" (Rom 9:22). And this longsuffering is not presented as being in any sense for their benefit, as if He were patiently waiting for them to turn to Him that

> He might be favourable to them. No, it is so that "he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory" (verse 23). Thus, God's wrathful enduring of the reprobate is for the purpose of mercifully manifesting His glory to the elect. Every temporal benefit, therefore, which comes to the reprobate is not without purpose, but is made effectual to them for their inuring [i.e., hardening] and making meet for damnation.[xiv]

In the same paper, Winzer concedes that God has a general love or benevolence for humanity in general, but he strongly insists that such benevolence cannot include any disposition of goodwill toward the non-elect.[xv] God can only be said to desire the damnation of those whose damnation he actually decrees.

Of course, it's true enough that God's indiscriminate common grace will aggravate the guilt and increase the punishment of the impenitent. That's the point of Romans 2:5. Moreover, God's damnation of the reprobate will also serve to highlight God's perfect justice and sovereign power while accentuating his mercy to the elect. That's the point of Romans 9:21-23. Nevertheless, the point of Romans 2:4 is quite another biblical truth.[xvi]

***To Lead the Sinner to Repentance***

Paul states the design of God's common grace in no uncertain terms. Addressing the self-righteous moralist who stubbornly persists in his impenitence, the apostle asserts, "God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance" (Rom 2:4 ESV). Paul uses the present indicative, which literally reads, "… is leading you to repentance" (cf. KJV, NAS, NIV). Some wrongly interpret this as a simple statement of fact, viz., God's goodness [efficaciously] leads [a subgroup of sinful humanity, namely, the elect] to saving repentance."[xvii] But Paul's use of the present indicative here has a tendential or voluntative force.[xviii] Accordingly, the ESV correctly renders it "is meant to lead" (cf. NRSV, NJB). Other English versions convey the tendential or voluntative as "is intended to lead" (HSCB; cf. NLT) or "would lead" (NAB).

That the force of Paul's language suggests a beneficent disposition on the part of God is further suggested by the likelihood that Paul is here echoing the language of the Wisdom of Solomon (circa 1st or 2nd century BC), an apocryphal book with which Paul would have been familiar. That book contains an indictment on the human race analogous to Paul's discourse in Romans 1:18-32. What's more, the author of Wisdom of Solomon highlights God's merciful design behind his patience and longsuffering toward sinners:

> But you are merciful to all (ἐλεεῖς δὲ πάντας) for you can do all things, and you overlook people's sins, so that they may repent (παρορᾷς ἁμαρτήματα ἀνθρώπων εἰς μετάνοιαν)

(Wisdom 11:23, NRSV).

A little later he writes,

> Though you were not unable to give the ungodly into the hands of the righteous in battle, or to destroy them at one blow by dread wild animals or your stern word. But judging them little by little you gave them an opportunity to repent (ἐδίδους τόπον μετανοίας), though you were not unaware that their origin was evil and their wickedness inborn, and that their way of thinking would never change (Wisdom 12:9-10, NRSV).

Paul's thought here finds some analogy in his discourse to the Greek philosophers at the Areopagus:

> And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God (ζητεῖν τὸν θεόν), in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us (Acts 17:26-27 ESV).

It's probable the apostle Peter had Paul's teaching in Romans 2:4 in view when Peter wrote in his Second Epistle:

> Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation (καὶ τὴν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν μακροθυμίαν σωτηρίαν ἡγεῖσθε), just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him (2 Pet 3:14-15 ESV).

Finally, we would suggest that this Pauline and Petrine notion of a saving design underlying God's benevolence and patience is what a pseudonymous writer in the fourth century plainly commends in the so-called the Apostolic Constitutions (AD 375-380) when he writes,

> Great art thou, Lord Almighty, and great is thy power; and to thine understanding there is no limit; our Creator and Saviour, rich in benefits, long-suffering, and the Bestower of mercy, who dost not take away thy salvation from thy creatures; for thou art good by nature, and sparest sinners, and invitest them to repentance (Greek: εις μετανοιαν προσκαλουμενος [summon] / Latin: eos ad penitential provocans); for admonition is the effect of thy bowels of compassion. For how should we abide if we were required to come to judgment immediately, when, after so much long-suffering, we hardly emerge from our miserable condition![xix]

In summary, then, from the evidence above we may conclude a saving design in the

indiscriminate common grace God showers on all men whether elect or non-elect.

## Conclusion

The larger implication of Romans 2:4 is the fact that we cannot limit God's desire for human compliance with the terms of the law and the gospel to the elect alone. Yet we fear that a strain of "High-Calvinism" does this very thing. Constrained by a "substance metaphysics" assumption that one cannot predicate non-actualized potency of God, i.e., unfulfilled wishes or desires,[xx] these theologians make every effort to avoid the force of such texts as Romans 2:4. Thus, John Gill admits that "the providential goodness of God has a tendency to lead persons to repentance." However, Gill is shackled to the unbiblical notion that God can only desire what he decrees. Since God evidently did not decree the salvation of the person(s) envisioned in this text, Gill must find a way to "reinterpret" it to fit his system:

> This is to be understood not of a spiritual and evangelical repentance, which is a free grace gift, and which none but the Spirit of God can lead, or bring persons to; but of a natural and legal repentance, which lies in an external sorrow for sin, and in an outward cessation from it, and reformation of life and manners, which the goodness of God to the Jews should have led them to.[xxi]

But if the repentance (μετάνοιάν) of verse four is the "natural and legal" kind, why does Paul insist that those who've been lead to such non-saving repentance will be judged as the Last Day because of the lack of repentance (ἀμετανόητον) in verse 5? Same Greek term with alpha privative! Closer to the truth is John Calvin when he concludes, "The design of [God's] benevolence is … to convert sinners to himself."[xxii] Indeed, it is Calvin's moderate and chaste form of "Calvinism" that better reflects the apostle's thinking. God's common grace cannot effect repentance in the sinner's heart apart from his saving grace. Nevertheless, God's common grace does serve to reveal God's salfivic posture toward fallen humanity, including those who ultimately resist his overtures of good will.

---

### NOTES:

[i] See, for example, Charles Hodge, A Commentary on Romans (1835; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1983), 46-47; C. E. B. Cranfield, Romans 1–8, ICC (London: T & T Clark, 2001), 136-39; John Murray, The Epistle to the Romans, 2 vols. NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 1:54-56; Leon Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 107-08; Douglas Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 126-27; Thomas Schreiner, Romans, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker

Academic, 1998), 105-07, among others.

[ii] The arguments for an inclusive reading include the following: (1) Romans 1:16 speaks of Jews and Greeks; no indication of a narrowing of scope to Gentiles in 1:18; (2) Romans 1:18-32 not just directed to Gentiles–verse 23 alludes to Ps 16:20 and Jer 2:11, which are indictments against Jews; (3) Romans 2:1 begins with a logical connector, "therefore," and suggests a continuation of the argument. "O Man" and "Everyone who" are general terms that apply to all men. Note also that "passing judgment" is something Gentiles are said to do in 2:15; (4) both Jews and Gentiles are addressed in 2:1-16; (5) the occurrence of anthropos in 1:18 and 2:16 may serve to bracket the whole pericope; (6) Romans 2:17 provides a clear transitional marker for shift from mankind in general to the Jews in particular: "But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God …." These arguments are drawn from Samuel Waldron's lecture notes for "Prolegomena I: Introduction to Systematic Theology and Apologetics" (Unpublished, n.d.), 108-09. Commentators who read the passage as inclusive include John Calvin, The Epistles of Paul to the Romans and to the Thessalonians, in vol. 8 of Calvin's Commentaries, trans. Ross Mackenzie (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 40-44; R. C. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (Colombus, OH: Wartburg Press, 1945), 128-30; F. F. Bruce, The Epistle of Paul to the Romans, TNTC (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1963), 86-89.

[iii] The Greek term καταφρονεῖς frequently refers to disrespect or contempt for authority. See 1 Tim 4:12; 6:2; Titus 2:15; 2 Pet 2:10.

[iv] "Failing to understand" (ἀγνοῶν) stands in apposition to "showing contempt" (καταφρονεῖς).

[v] In some cases, "not knowing" doesn't imply any fault or moral culpability. See Rom 1:13; 1 Cor 12:1; 1 Thess 4:13. In other cases, however, such blindness is morally culpable. See Rom 10:3; 1 Cor 14:38; 2 Pet 2:12). We agree with W. G. T. Shedd who interprets the ignorance in Romans 2:4 as belonging to the second category: "The word implies an action of the will along with that of the understanding. It is that culpable ignorance which results: 1. from not reflecting upon the truth; and 2. from an aversion to the repentance which the truth is fitted to produce. It is the 'willing ignorance' spoken of in 2 Pet. iii.5." Commentary on Romans (1879; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), 37.

[vi] Thomas Schreiner doesn't miss the irony: "The word θησαυρίζεις (thesaurizeis, you are storing up, v. 5) is probably ironical, for it typically denotes the future bliss Jews would have because of their good works (Tob 4:9-10; 2 Esdr [4 Ezra] 6:5; 7:77; 8:33, 36; 2 Bar 14:12)." Romans, 109.

[vii] Herman Hoeksema tries to interpret the 2nd person singular pronoun σε ("you") as generic for humanity in general, thus allowing that some of whom Paul addresses here (the elect) actually come to repentance (2:4) while others (the reprobate) do not and are condemned (2:5). See his Reformed Dogmatics (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1966), 119. Of course, the "Man" (ἄνθρωπε) whom Paul here addresses (2:1, 3) is generic. But, as argued above, Paul's focus is more narrow than humanity in general. Moreover, the σε ("you")

in verse 4 is the same "you" in verse 5 as the 2nd person singular pronoun σου ("your") and reflexive σεαυτῷ ("yourself") demonstrate. We suspect that Hoeksema's dogmatics are driving his exegesis, rather than the other way around. See K. W. Stebbins' critique of Hoeksema's exegesis in Christ Freely Offered (Strathpine North, Australia: Covenanter Press, 1978), 72-73.

[viii] Semantics of Biblical Language (1961; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004). 263.

[ix] Exegetical Fallacies (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 45-46.

[x] Sometimes humans show "grace" or withhold it (Gen 33:10; 39:4; 50:4; Exod 3:21; Ruth 2:2, 10; 1 Sam 20:3, 29; Eph 4:29; Deut 24:1; Luke 6:32-34; Acts 20:27; 25:29; 2 Cor 8:7, 9). Sometimes "grace" is used for "adornment" (Prov 3:22; 4:9; Prov 17:8) or something like "graceful," "charming" or "fitting" (Prov 5:19; 7:5; Prov 10:32).

[xi] The parallelism of verse 8 and 9 make God's "grace" synonymous with his "goodness."

[xii] Commentary on Romans, 37.

[xiii] I expand on each of these points in my brief theology of human culture, "Pro-Cultural" or "Counter-Cultural"? A Theology of Human Culture (Nov 11, 2011). For fuller treatments, see Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 432-46; John Murray, "Common Grace," in vol. 2 of Collected Writings of John Murray (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 93-119; Anthony Hoekema, Created in God's Image (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 187-202; Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 657-668.

[xiv] "Murray on the Free Offer: A Review by Matthew Winzer" (2000): http://www.fpcr.org/blue_banner_articles/murray-free-offer-review.htm (accessed Sept 18, 2008).

[xv] We rather agree with John Murray when he remarks, "It is a metallic conception of God's forbearance and longsuffering that isolates them from the kindness of disposition and of benefaction which the goodness of God implies." The Epistle to the Romans, 59.

[xvi] Robert Haldane is on target in his commentary on Romans 2:4: "From this it evidently follows that God externally calls many to whom He has not purposed to give the grace of conversion. It also follows that it cannot be said that when God thus externally calls persons on whom it is not His purpose to bestow grace, His object is only to render them inexcusable. For if that were the case, the Apostle would not have spoken of the riches of His goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering,–terms which would not be applicable, if, by such a call, it was intended merely to render men inexcusable." The Epistle to the Romans (Edinburgh: William Oliphant and Co., 1874), 78-79.

[xvii] For instance, in Hoeksema's opinion "the text states a fact: the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance, εἰς μετάνοιάν σε ἄγει." Then he argues that Paul is addressing humanity in general. Finally, Hoeksema opines, "It makes no difference whether the apostle has in mind the Jew or Jews and Gentiles both. Of this 'man' it may, indeed, be said that God's goodness actually leads him to repentance, as is clearly evident in the case of the elect. Yet, it may also be said of man that he despises the goodness of God, and does not know by actual experience that it leads him to repentance as, again, is evident in the case of the reprobate that rejects the gospel, and thus aggravates his condemnation." Reformed Dogmatics, 119. Once again, we think Hoeksema's dogmatics skew his exegesis.

[xviii] More fully, the present indicative as gnomic (affirming a general truth) and voluntative or tendential (expressing intention without reference to the outcome). Douglas Moo refers to it as conative, which coveys a similar modal sense. The Epistle to the Romans, 133, n. 42; cf. Cranfield, Romans I, 145; C. F. D. Moule, An Idiom Book of the New Testament (Cambridge, 1953), 8; Henry Alford, The New Testament for English Readers (Chicago: Moody Press, n.d.), 856; Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, A Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Romans (New York: United Bible Societies, 1973), 33-34. Grammarians who discuss this use of the indicative include Dana and Mantey, A Manual Grammar (New York: MacMillan Company, 1956), 186; and Daniel Wallace, Beyond Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 534-35, 752).

[xix] Clement, Bishop and Citizen Of Rome (Pseudonym) The Work Claiming To Be The Constitutions Of The Holy Apostles, Including The Canons; William Whiston's Version, Revised From The Greek; Irah Chase, Otto Krabbe; D. Appleton and company, 1848), Book 7, 35.1, [p. 150]. http://ldsfocuschrist2.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/apostolic-constitutions-william-whiston.pdf (accessed Feb 22, 2014).

[xx] The argument seems to go something like this: God's essence is identical with his will and God's will is delimited by God's decree. To predicate unfulfilled desires of God is to affirm parts of God that are non-actualized potencies. In a word, it is to deny that God is "pure act" (actus purus) and to affirm that he is composed of both actualized desires and also non-actualized desires. For a philosophical defense of this notion, see James E. Dolezal, God Without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 34-44, 177-87, 188-91, 194-97. Yet here is a case when the musings of "natural theology" bump up against the clear testimony of Scripture. When that happens, so much the worse for natural theology.

[xxi] Exposition of the Bible, Online edition: Romans 2: http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/romans-2-4.html (accessed Feb 24, 2014).

[xxii] Calvin's Commentaries, trans. John King; Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), Accordance electronic edition. Cf. Shedd, Commentary on Romans, 37; Hodge, A Commentary on Romans, 48-49; Thomas Chalmers, Lectures on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans (New York: Robert Carter, 1845), 39;

Murray, The Epistle to the Romans, 59-60; Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, 133; Cranfield, Romans 1–8, 145.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Bob Gonzales has served as a pastor of four Reformed Baptist congregations and has been the Academic Dean and a professor of RBS since 2005. He is the author of Where Sin Abounds: the Spread of Sin and the Curse in Genesis with Special Focus on the Patriarchal Narratives (Wipf & Stock, 2010) and has contributed to the Reformed Baptist Theological Review and Westminster Theological Journal. Dr Gonzales is a member of the Evangelical Theological Society. He and his wife, Becky, reside in Sacramento, California.