

Calvinism Unmasked

Chapter 1

I'm a Calvinist

After I graduated from high school in 1951, I believed in Jesus Christ as my savior. Shortly after that, I was disciplined by a high school friend of mine who went to the church where I got saved. Although the church was Arminian in theology, he was a Calvinist. All the Scripture he showed me was interpreted from that viewpoint. Since the explanations seemed reasonable to me, I became a strong advocate of Calvinism, reflecting Calvin's statement in his Institutes:

No one who wishes to be thought religious dares simply deny predestination, by which God adopts some to hope of life, and sentences others to eternal death. But our opponents, especially those who make foreknowledge its cause, envelop it in numerous petty objections. We indeed place both doctrines in God, but we say that subjecting one to the other is absurd. When we attribute foreknowledge to God, we mean that all things always were, and perpetually remain, under his eyes, so that to his knowledge there is nothing future or past, but all things are present. And they are present in such a way that he not only conceives them through ideas, as we have before us those things which our minds remember, but he truly looks upon them and discerns them as things placed before him. And this foreknowledge is extended throughout the universe to every creature. We call predestination God's eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death.¹

Later, I was influenced by my wife's dear uncle, who was a Universal Reconciliationist. He showed me in 1 Timothy 2:3-6, that God willed all men to be saved:

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who wills all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

He explained that not all were saved in this life, but all would eventually be reconciled to God. He showed me that there were many ages in the Bible. This reconciliation would happen at the end of the ages. This added to my problem. Now I was wrestling with two doctrines – the doctrine of universal reconciliation, all will be reconciled to God, and limited atonement, Christ died only for the elect. At that time it seemed that these were my only choices. I believed God's word is true and there is consistency in the biblical statements. Either God foreknew and predestined only the elect to be saved, or He exhaustively foreknew the future and willed all to be saved. Which one was right? Did God will only the elect to be saved? Or did He will all to be saved ultimately? I thought it had to be one or the other.

A Breach in My Calvinist Armor

Shortly after we moved to California in 1957, my pastor presented an idea to me that was new. He showed me another interpretation of Ephesians 1:4,5:

just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.

He explained to me that both the election and predestination here were corporate. He pointed out in the passage that it didn't say individuals were chosen to be saved or predestined to be saved. Instead, they were elected, because they were in the body of Christ, to be holy and without blame, and predestined to the adoption as sons.

In a different way of looking at it, I also saw that the nation of Israel was God's elect, but many in elect Israel did not believe and were, ultimately, not included in redeemed Israel, God's elect nation. Isaiah 45:1-4 shows Israel is His elect: "Thus says the LORD to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held – to subdue nations before him and loose the armor of kings, to open before him the double doors, so that the gates will not be shut: 2 'I will go before you and make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of

¹ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, v. 2, Book III, Ch XXI, sec. 5, p. 926, Ed. John McNeill, Westminster Press, 1960.

bronze and cut the bars of iron. 3 I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places, that you may know that I, the LORD, Who call you by your name, am the God of Israel. 4 For Jacob My servant's sake, and **Israel My elect**, I have even called you by your name; I have named you, though you have not known Me."

These ideas were the first problems I faced in my Calvinistic belief. However, in my mind, the idea of corporate election and predestination had a serious flaw which the Scriptures did not seem to support. That problem could be stated as follows: In this theory, in contrast to Calvin's view of predestination, God's foreknowledge was the basis of His election and predestination. But, I reasoned as Calvin wrote, since to God "all things always were, and perpetually remain, under his eyes, so that to his knowledge there is nothing future or past, but all things are present", God knew everything as though it were present. Then, since I could see from Scripture that His election and predestination followed His foreknowledge, and since He knew everyone who was foreknown, then God's predestination had to be individual just as His foreknowledge was. I was right back where I started. I could not reconcile this apparent biblical antinomy or paradox.

At this time of my life, this deterministic theology had a detrimental influence on my attitudes about prayer. If God knew everything, and I believed He did; and if God predestinated everything based on His foreknowledge, and I believed He did that too; then, everything that I prayed was foreknown and predestined. If I didn't pray, that also was predestined; then, it became easy to feel, why should I pray? Unfortunately, I ended up having an abysmal prayer life. The only reason I prayed, I determined in my mind, was because God commanded it in His word. I realized that Christ and Paul were zealous in prayer, however, there was no zest in my prayers. Therefore, I recognized that something was seriously wrong with my Christian life. I knew this was wrong but didn't know what to do about it.

During this troublesome period, my wife and I visited her parents in Illinois. Her father had a treasure trove of theological books. I was browsing through his books when I found one by William E. Biederwolf titled, *How Can God Answer Prayer?* I began reading it immediately. BOOK THREE chapter IV. had the title, "Why Pray if Everything Is Predetermined by God?" That was exactly my dilemma. I eagerly turned to that page. He had three answers based on three different explanations:

The first explanation declares that everything which comes to pass is first predetermined in the mind of God. It declares that God's predestination precedes His foreknowledge as the ground of certainty for human action. God only foreknows that which He has predetermined to take place.

The second explanation, while admitting that God absolutely predetermines some things, contends that such things as respect the government of his free moral agents are only conditionally predetermined. God purposes to do under certain conditions, which depend upon the free agency of man, what He would not do under other conditions. This explanation further declares that God's foreknowledge precedes His predestination. God only predetermines that which He foreknows will take place and the foreknowledge of human action has no influence upon its taking place; it does not necessitate the action.

The third explanation denies that God's foreknowledge is necessarily all-comprehending.²

The third explanation was a brand new idea to me. He then evaluated three suppositions. He started with, "Suppose we accept". I will skip the first two explanations and will start with his third supposition:

3. Suppose we accept the third explanation: the explanation which affirms that God's foreknowledge and foreordination are not necessarily all-comprehending.

You shrink from an attitude of thought like that toward the Supreme Being. It appears, does it not, to reflect discredit upon His perfection? Yet, let us not be too hasty in our judgment. Many earnest and noted scholars defend the position and strenuously maintain that not only does it not dishonor God, but that it is the only scheme of thought which does not divest Him of the essential attributes of His divinity.

The position is quite clearly set forth in W.W. Kinsley's "Science and Prayer," . . . This explanation, if it may be maintained consistently with the perfection of God's character, relieves us, of course, of the difficulty in question.

It is contended by the advocates of this explanation, that when God created us in His own image and made us equally with Himself of sovereign will (and we know we are free to choose as we will) by His very so doing He surrendered at least partially His control over us and of necessity limited thereby His

² Biederwolf, William E., *How Can God Answer Prayer?*, pp. 106,107, The Winona Publishing Co., Chicago, Ill., 1906.

foreknowledge concerning us. Plainly it is the old time-worn controversy between two great schools of theology; between God's sovereignty on one side (involving as it does His absolute foreknowledge and predestination) and man's free will on the other, and between the horns of such a dilemma the only thing to do is to confess a wise ignorance and hang on to both.

A controversion of God's perfect foreknowledge does not set well with most of us, regardless of our denominational bias. The fear, however, of any belittling conception of God its advocates would overcome by showing what the theory of such foreknowledge really involves, leaving us to decide which is the greater injustice, if any, to the all-perfect character of God.

The following from the work above quoted on "Science and Prayer" will help us to an appreciation, if so be such is possible, of the position assumed by the advocates of the limited knowledge theory. The author says: "No petitioner can plead with any genuine unction unless he believes that he can actually effect some change in the purposes existing in the divine mind at the time his prayer is offered. . . . If God foreknows everything that will ever come to pass, all His own mental states must necessarily be included in that foreknowledge. A moment's reflection will convince us that otherwise there is not a single present intention or plan but what is exposed to the possibility of modification. If a single thought or emotion is ever going to spring up in God's mind unanticipated, God Himself must be as ignorant as we as to what part of His vast plan it will pertain. And so, if we would logically defend a belief in the all-comprehensiveness of God's foreknowledge, we must affirm that not a single new idea can arise in His mind—not a single new emotion be felt—and that if He is thus limited now He must have been equally so at every moment in all the eternal past, and must be through all the years to come; for if there ever has been, or ever will be, a moment when a new thought can thus come, then during all the time preceding that moment the foreknowledge was incomplete. Where does this lead? In what sort of an intellectual or emotional condition does this irrefragable logic compel us to assert God to be continually? Unquestionably that of perfect stagnation. No thought processes can be carried on under such conditions—no succession of ideas, no change of mental state; but God must have been and must still be imprisoned in a hopelessly dead calm. . . . When, then, did He form His plans for creation? Under this supposition there never could have been a time when He began to think about them. . . . If God has had no thought succession, He can have had no feeling; His emotional state having ever necessarily been that of unbroken placidity—of absolute apathy, His heart throbbless as a stone. He could experience no change of feeling, for that would involve thought-succession. From all the sources of joy or sorrow of which we can conceive He would be utterly debarred – from pleasurable or painful memories, from hopes and forebodings, from social sympathies, from emotions that accompany changes, contrasts, surprises, from the glow of activity, even from the delights and griefs of contemplation; for they all involve thought-movement. Therefore, under this supposition God can have no emotional activity, for He would have no thought-activity for its background. Thoughts must, of course, come and go, or the heart lies dead." "Such," he says, "are the absurdities in which we become hopelessly entangled the moment we attempt to defend the doctrine of God's perfect foreknowledge."³

This was astounding to me. If this were true, it would change everything. But he had presented no Scripture to back up the argument. It was just philosophical reasoning. I had already been shown and then studied God's word on this subject. The Bible said that God worked all things after the counsel of His will. But I thought about his statements. I must find a copy of that book, *Science and Prayer*, and see if there was any Scripture to back up this argument.

I relentlessly searched until I finally found the book in a used book store. I avidly read it, but it also was very philosophical. However, he wrote: "The doctrine of God's perfect foreknowledge is not only unphilosophical, but also unscriptural."⁴ That encouraged me to read further. I got to the part that Biederwolf had quoted. Then I realized Biederwolf had skipped the most important part, for me, the reference to Scripture. It was there! Kinsley even admonished the reader:

Read if you will the ninth chapter of Deuteronomy. Moses here rehearses the several rebellions of Israel, and his three separate pleadings before the Lord, of forty days and forty nights each, without either eating

³
op. cit., pp. 106-118.

⁴
Kinsley, W. W., *Science and Prayer*, p. 80, The Chautauqua Century Press, Meadville, Pa, 1893.

bread or drinking water. Each time he fell down before a very angry God who had fully purposed, and had definitely announced his purpose to destroy the rebels, and each time, if Moses can be credited, he actually changed that purpose right then and there and rescued his people. The God here depicted had none of that foreknowledge which theologians with such strange unanimity ascribe to him. But, say you, [And many have made these statements often.] that and similar accounts scattered throughout the Bible are simply instances of anthropomorphism, of rhetorical accommodation, of describing in the language of human experiences and human limitations what really transcends the human; that it was not the intent to have these narrations interpreted as literal history, but as poetic approximations of dim shadowings of really ineffable truths. It seems to me that it would be a strange way to bring the truth within our comprehension, to state what is directly opposed to the truth, and to reiterate the downright falsehood again and again, in a most misleading way, and in a matter of such vital moment that all possibility of religious life depends on it, and through which alone any lasting comfort comes to the hungry human soul.⁵

What happened next changed my life. I read Deuteronomy 9 with a searching heart. Here is what shattered the foundations of my Calvinistic system of theology:

Deu 9:8-19 Also in Horeb you provoked the Lord to wrath, so that the Lord was angry enough with you to have destroyed you. 9 When I went up into the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant which the Lord made with you, then I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water. 10 Then the Lord delivered to me two tablets of stone written with the finger of God, and on them were all the words which the Lord had spoken to you on the mountain from the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly. 11 And it came to pass, at the end of forty days and forty nights, that the Lord gave me the two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant. 12 Then the Lord said to me, ‘Arise, go down quickly from here, for your people whom you brought out of Egypt have acted corruptly; they have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them; they have made themselves a molded image.’ 13 Furthermore the Lord spoke to me, saying, “I have seen this people, and indeed they are a stiff-necked people. 14 **Let Me alone, that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven; and I will make of you a nation mightier and greater than they.**” 15 So I turned and came down from the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire; and the two tablets of the covenant were in my two hands. 16 And I looked, and behold, you had sinned against the Lord your God—had made for yourselves a molded calf! You had turned aside quickly from the way which the Lord had commanded you. 17 Then I took the two tablets and threw them out of my two hands and broke them before your eyes. 18 And I fell down before the Lord, as at the first, forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all your sin which you committed in doing wickedly in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. 19 For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the Lord was angry with you, to destroy you. But the Lord listened to me at that time also.

This Scripture shattered my presuppositions. Along with other Scripture it undermined my Calvinistic mindset about the immutability of God. Here was Scripture I had read but never grasped before. Before long, I found that there was a vast amount of Scripture which showed that God changed His mind – even repented. Since that time, I have studied the Bible on this issue for thousands of hours. This book is the result of my studies.

Chapter 2

The Origin of My Presuppositions

If you are willing to wade through the evidence that shows Augustine’s determinism was derived from Greek philosophy, that is what I would suggest. Here is the material. I have put some of the evidence here. There is much more. If you are willing to take my word that Plato and Aristotle, through Plotinus, influenced Augustine to frame his theology about God based strictly on Greek philosophy, fine. Then, proceed to “The Evidence” at the end of this chapter.

I believed God was Immutable. What does immutable mean? The word immutable means not subject to

⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 81,82.

change. This idea of immutability is the basis for many of the tenets of Calvinistic doctrine. How did this idea of God's immutability originate? We don't know for sure, but as far as influence, it came from Plato. Plato (427-347 BC), the great philosopher of Athens, has been a major influence on philosophical thought for about 2,400 years. By this time, I had translated a few of Plato's dialogues in my Greek classes at UCLA. He was fairly easy to translate. He also used a dialogical method of making his points.

Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo (354-430), had a passion for wisdom and philosophy. From philosophy he learned the doctrine of the Immutability of God. He incorporated this doctrine into his Christian theology after his conversion. Augustine's theology influenced the Reformation through an Augustinian monk, Martin Luther. Luther and Augustine had a great influence on John Calvin. Aspects of Calvin's theology have been foundational for most evangelical theologies since the reformation.⁶

The doctrine of immutability, especially, has influenced the theology of the Christian world. Augustine and Calvin believed that God reveals something about himself both through nature and the reason of man. Since we are created in the image of God, we seem to have some innate knowledge that causes us to understand and even long for God. In addition, God reveals something about himself through his creation. However, man has rebelled, and in general, wants to do his own thing.

Plato's Doctrine of Immutability

Plato honored his mentor, Socrates, in his books by making him the protagonist of the dialogs. It is through Plato that we have an idea of the philosophy and thought of Socrates since no works of Socrates have been found. Immutability became the foundational doctrine in Plato's theology concerning the attributes of God's character.

We can write a logical syllogism of Plato's doctrine of the Immutability of God in two ways. First we will look at it from Plato's viewpoint:

The perfect does not change.
God is perfect.
God does not change.

The well read person in the ancient world of Augustine understood the immutability concept Plato applied to God. This idea was found in almost every school of philosophy of that time. Plato himself explained it this way in, "A dialogue between Socrates and Adeimantus."

(Socrates) Is it not true that **to be altered and moved by something else** happens least to things that are in the best condition . . . that the healthiest and strongest is least altered. . . . And is it not the soul that is bravest and most intelligent that would be least disturbed and altered by any external affection . . . **that those which are well made and in good condition are least liable to be changed by time and other influences.** (Adeimantus) That is so. (Socrates) It is universally true then, that that which is in the best state by nature or art or both admits least alteration by something else. (Adeimantus) So it seems. (Socrates) But God, surely and everything that belongs to God is in every way in the best possible state. . . . Then does he [God] change himself for the better and to something fairer, or for the worse and to something uglier than himself? It must necessarily **be for the worse if he is changed . . . the gods themselves are incapable of change. . . . Then God** is altogether simple and true in deed and word, and **neither changes himself nor deceives others.**⁷

In this dialogue between Socrates and Adeimantus, Plato presented his ideas about the Immutability of God. This concept was apparently adopted by Augustine through the writings of Plato and the Neo-Platonists.

I want to comment on the phrases in this quotation that I have emphasized. He explained his idea of perfection in this dialogue. It does seem reasonable that those articles that change the least are the most perfect. For example, a person may purchase a pair of shoes that are comfortable and fit well. Over time the shoes begin to show wear and may eventually tear "**to be altered and moved by something else**". The soles of the shoes

⁶ I am indebted to Craig Fisher for the great amount of research he did in the writings of Plotinus and Augustine.

⁷ Plato, *Republic I*, Loeb Classical Library, Book II, pp. 191-197. **All bold is my emphasis.**

will wear until they get holes that allow dirt to enter. Eventually, the shoes must be replaced. For our purpose, those shoes that last the longest or stay in their original condition longer would be the best shoes, **“that those which are well made and in good condition are least liable to be changed by time and other influences”**. A perfect shoe would last forever without changing. Any change in a perfect shoe would make the shoe less perfect or worse than perfect, **“be for the worse if he is changed”**. Since God is perfect, He is not altered or moved by something else. So an attribute of Plato’s God is immutability **“the gods themselves are incapable of change . . . Then God . . . neither changes himself nor deceives others”**.

In the Platonic manner, Augustine considered the application of pure reason, using the intellect, as superior to the evidence of the senses. Augustine would try to leave the sense world of the body and retreat into the spiritual world of introspection and escape from the body. This method is similar to some modern day evangelicals who have used philosophical methods to ascertain doctrine and have subordinated revelation to reason. Augustine struggled over this issue. To Augustine the question was reason versus authority. What came first, reason or authority? He believed all faith presupposed reason. Only an irrational faith would be founded on an irrational authority. The authority had to be judged rational first. Then man, because he is fallen and unable to reason perfectly, needed revelation to understand God.

Therefore, Augustine adopted some presuppositions from Platonic reasoning. Among these presuppositions was the doctrine of the immutability of God. Greek philosophy had a tremendous influence on Augustine. Augustine had already concluded that the idea of a mutable God was an absurdity. Earlier in his life, when Augustine had read the Bible, he saw that the Bible revealed a mutable God. This caused him to doubt its veracity. Only after Ambrose (c. 340-397), Bishop of Milan, allegorized the Old Testament Scriptures, was Augustine able to accept the Catholic faith. Ambrose allegorized or spiritualized the offending Old Testament Scripture to the point that Augustine was able to accept the Christian God. He wrote:

For those absurdities which in those Scriptures were wont to offend me, after I had heard divers of them expounded properly, I referred now to the depth of the mystery: yea and the authority of that Book appeared so much the more venerable, and so much more worthy of our religious credit.⁸

As we evaluate this information, we can see Augustine’s thought progression. Certain absurdities had hindered Augustine from believing in the Word of God. Augustine believed that God was immutable. To him it was absurd to believe in a God who could change his mind or be mutable. How did Augustine know that this was absurd? He believed the force of reason explained what was absurd. The source of his reasoning was Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy. After hearing Ambrose, Augustine thought he was able to judge biblical authority to be rational. Augustine only turned to the Scriptures after the absurdities were “expounded properly.” Now he could rely on Scripture for the spiritual help he needed. He needed this help since he had uncontrollable drives his reason was not able to overcome, his sexual desires.⁹ “Seeing therefore mankind would prove too weak to find out the truth by the way of evident reason, and for this cause was there need of the authority of Holy Writ:”¹⁰

Although Augustine later developed a high regard for Scripture, he allowed philosophical reason to first dictate his ideas about God’s attributes. Then, he filled in the details by using the Scriptures. His primary presupposition was the immutability of God. This doctrine of immutability influenced him as he developed his doctrines of predestination, foreknowledge and the atemporality of God. Subsequently Augustine’s doctrines had enormous influence on John Calvin. This influence of Augustine over Calvin is attested by Calvinists. For example, Benjamin Warfield wrote, “The system of doctrine taught by Calvin is just the Augustinianism common to the whole body of the Reformers—for the Reformation was, as from the spiritual point of view a great revival of Augustinianism.”¹¹

Where did Plato acquire his ideas?

⁸ Augustine. *St. Augustine's Confessions I*, Loeb Classical Library, Book VI, p. 285, trans. by W. Watts.

⁹ Latourette, Kenneth S., *A History of Christianity*, Harper & Row, 1975, V. I., pp. 96-98.

¹⁰ Augustine, *loc. cit.*

¹¹ Warfield, B., *Calvin and Augustine*, The Presb. & Reformed Pub. Co., Philadelphia, Pa, 1956, p.22.

Plato was a student of Socrates. Interestingly, Augustine discussed the source of Socrates' inspiration: "what kind that deity was who attended on Socrates, a sort of familiar, by whom it is said he was admonished to desist from any action which would not turn out to his advantage."¹² Apparently Socrates had a familiar spirit which encouraged him to teach philosophy. Do you think it would be wrong to say Socrates was influenced by a demon?

Augustine argued with a writer, Apuleius, about Socrates. Apuleius wrote a book, *Concerning the God of Socrates*, where he sought to prove that this "god" was really a demon. What was Augustine's argument in support of Socrates? Augustine contended that demons love the theater. This familiar spirit did not approve of the theater. Therefore, this familiar spirit was not a demon. Augustine's conclusion was, "Apuleius is wrong, and Socrates' familiar did not belong to this class of deities."¹³ We can see that Augustine's proclivity for Platonic philosophy influenced his conclusion. He believed that Socrates did have a familiar or spirit, but that the spirit was not a demon. What would a spirit in an unregenerated man be? An angel? The Holy Spirit? A demon? Would any Evangelical Christian accept Augustine's explanation today? No!

Did Plato's doctrine of the Immutability of God originally come from Socrates? Plato's discussion was a dialogue between Adeimantus and Socrates. It is probable that Plato heard this discussion while he listened to his mentor teaching. Although Plato may have entered some original material into these dialogues, the evidence favors Socrates as the Greek developer of this doctrine.

Augustine's rationale for adopting the doctrine of the immutability of God

How was Augustine able to take the Platonic philosophy of the immutability of God and syncretize it into a biblical theology? This is important since this doctrine influenced Augustine in the development of other important doctrines pertaining to the attributes of God. These included predestination, prescience, impassibility and atemporality.

Although Augustine, was raised by a Christian mother, he wandered from the Christian faith. He was impressed by a work of Cicero called *Hortensius*. By reading this work, he developed a love for philosophy. Although Augustine loved philosophy, he still superstitiously clung to some aspects of the faith of his mother. In contrast, Augustine resisted becoming a disciple of Cicero's philosophy because he did not find the name of the Catholic God in his works. However, another group who held the ideas of Mani, called Manichaeism,¹⁴ combined the rationalism of the philosophers with the appropriate "God-names," the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost. This persuaded Augustine to become a follower of this sect. He was associated with them for nine years.

The Manichaeans stressed rational inquiry over authority. Augustine agreed with this method of ascertaining truth. The Manichaeans disliked the Old Testament because it revealed an angry emotional God. Needless to say, the Platonic conception of an immutable God was common in most of the Greek philosophies of Augustine's age. Eugene TeSelle stated: "People acquainted with philosophical notions of God were uncomfortable with the anthropomorphisms of the Old Testament (not only with its descriptions of God but its suggestions that God has human emotions, or changes his mind)."¹⁵

Augustine was torn between his mother's religion and the rationalism he admired in the philosophies prevalent in his day. He became a teacher in North Africa, then in Rome, and eventually he arrived in Milan. Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan, offered a solution to Augustine's dilemma: a reconciliation between philosophy and Catholicism. Here are Augustine's own words:

And for this I rejoiced also, for that the Old Scriptures of the Law and the prophets, were laid before me

¹² Augustine, *City of God*, New York: Random House, 1950, Book VIII, p.259.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

¹⁴ Latourette, *Op. cit.*, pp. 95,96. Beaver, R. P. et. al., *Eerdman's Handbook to the World's Religions*, p. 113. Mani (216-276), a Persian prophet born in Mesopotamia, founded this sect. He was influenced by Zoroastrianism, ancient Babylonian beliefs, and Judaism, as well as Christianity. The Cologne Codex confirmed Arabic traditions that Mani was raised among a Jewish-Christian Baptist group. One of his writings, *The Living Gospel*, proclaimed Mani as the Paraclete foretold by Christ.

¹⁵ TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1970, p.30.

now, to be perused, not with that eye to which they seemed most **absurd** before, whereas I disliked thy holy ones for thinking so and so: but indeed they did not think so. And with joyful heart I heard Ambrose in his sermons to the people, most diligently oftentimes recommend this text for a rule unto them, The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life: whilst those things which taken according to the letter **seemed to teach perverse doctrines, he spiritually laid open to us**, having taken off the veil of the mystery; **teaching nothing in it that offended me.**¹⁶

It must be horrible when God's word offends. Augustine also explained the reasoning which allowed him to be converted to the Catholic faith:

For first of all the things began to appear unto me as possible to be defended: and the Catholic faith, in defense of which I thought nothing could be answered to the Manichees' arguments, I now concluded with myself, might well be maintained without **absurdity**: especially after I had heard one or two hard places of the Old Testament resolved now and then; **which when I understood literally, I was slain.** Many places therefore of those books having been **spiritually expounded.**¹⁷

What could Augustine not accept literally? The most important biblical concept Augustine rejected was the mutability of God, that God could change his will from one time to the next in order to adjust to a changeable mankind, or change His dispensational plan when He saw fit. In his Confessions, Augustine explained which literal interpretations were unacceptable. Here is one of his statements:

And because God commanded them one thing then, and these another thing now for certain temporal respects; and yet those of both ages were servants to the same righteousness, whereas they may observe in one man, and in one day, and in one house, different things to be fit for different members, and **one thing to be lawful now, which in an hour hence is not so**; and something to be permitted or commanded in one corner, which is forbidden or punished in another. Is Justice thereupon various or **mutable.**¹⁸

The Manichaeans believed God could not be mutable and retain His perfection. Augustine accepted this rationalistic philosophy as true and attempted to prove this doctrine with Scripture.

In another writing, *On the Morals of the Catholic Church*, Augustine explained which doctrines of the Old Testament were so absurd. In explaining his dispute with the Manichaeans we can see his agreement with them against the literal interpretation of the Old Testament.

We do not worship a **God who repents**, or is envious, or needy, or cruel, or who takes pleasure in the blood of men or beasts, or is pleased with guilt or crime, or whose possession of the earth is limited to a little corner of it. These and such like are the silly notions . . . the fancies of old women or of children . . . and in those by whom these passages are **literally understood.** . . . And should any one suppose that anything in

God's substance or nature **can suffer change or conversion**, he will be held guilty of wild profanity.¹⁹

Augustine agreed with the Manichaeans that a mutable God was totally unacceptable. In this conflict between the Platonic doctrine of immutability and the literal interpretation of Scriptures, what had to change? Augustine's answer was that the literal interpretation of Scripture had to change. For Augustine the plain narratives of Scripture had to be reinterpreted by spiritual or allegorical methods to agree with his philosophical presuppositions. The Manichaeans believed the Old Testament revealed a God who was mutable or could repent. Since the Platonists believed that God was immutable this idea of God repenting was a source of ridicule for the Catholic Church. Augustine was so embarrassed by these arguments that he chose to reinterpret Scripture rather than refute the Platonic philosophy.

Augustine found the immutable God by meditation

Even in Augustine's account of his conversion he displayed his Platonic persuasion. Augustine found the unchangeable God in his mind by Platonic introspection.

¹⁶ *St. Augustine's Confessions*, Book VI, p. 259. I changed whenas I misliked to whereas I disliked.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Book V, p. 259.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Book III, p. 125.

¹⁹ Oats, W.J., "On the Morals of the Catholic Church," *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*, New York: Random House Publishers, 1948, p. 327.

I had by this time found the unchangeable and the true eternity of truth, residing above this changeable mind of mine. And thus by degrees passing from bodies to the soul, which makes use of the senses of the body to perceive by: and from thence to its inner faculties . . . and so forward, as far as the irrational creatures are able to go: and thence again I passed on to the reasoning faculties, unto whatever is received from the senses of the body is referred to be judged.²⁰

Did Augustine come to understand God as immutable from a study of the Scriptures? No! Augustine was meditating about God and saw an immutable God in his mind. However, in reality, Augustine received the concept of the unchangeable or immutable God from the Platonists and neo-Platonists. This concept passed right into his Christian theology without change.

Augustine's fondness for Platonic Philosophers

We can see Augustine's admiration of Neoplatonic Philosophers. His "Christian" philosophy was greatly influenced by these men. Augustine claimed Ambrose was so Platonic in his preaching that people were saying all the maxims of the Lord Jesus Christ were from the works of Plato. Ambrose stated that Plato learned his maxims from Jeremiah.²¹ Of course this was nonsense and repudiated by Augustine later in life but the incident demonstrates how thoroughly Platonic philosophies had influenced Ambrose. But, remember, Ambrose was a major influence in Augustine's conversion. Augustine further encouraged the use of Platonic philosophy in his *Confessions*:

Furthermore, if those who are called philosophers, especially the Platonists, have said things by chance that are truthful and conformable to our faith, we must not only have no fear of them, but even appropriate them for our own use from those who are, in a sense, their legal possessors.²²

Augustine explained how the Israelites left Egypt with the gold of the Egyptians. In the same manner Christians should plunder the gold from the philosophers.

Augustine praised the Platonic philosophers for having a doctrine, the Immutability of God, that was so close to the Christian conception of God: "But, among the disciples of Socrates, Plato was the one who shone with a glory which far excelled that of all others, and who not unjustly eclipsed them all."²³ "For those who are praised as having most closely followed Plato, who is justly preferred to all the other philosophers of the Gentiles."²⁴ "It is evident that none come nearer to us than the Platonists."²⁵

These philosophers, then, whom we see not undeservedly exalted above the rest in fame and glory, have seen that no material body is God, and therefore they have transcended all bodies in seeking for God. They have seen that whatever is changeable is not the most high God, and therefore they have transcended every soul and all changeable spirits in seeking the supreme. . . . He who is clever judges better than he who is slow, he who is skilled than he who is unskillful, he who is practiced than he who is unpracticed; and the same person judges better after he has gained experience than he did before. But that which is capable of more and less is mutable; whence able men, who have thought deeply on these things, have gathered that the first form is not to be found in those things whose form is changeable.²⁶

"Whether these philosophers may be more suitably called Platonists . . . we prefer these to all other philosophers, and confess that they approach nearest to us."²⁷

Then, as to Plato's saying that the philosopher is a lover of God, nothing shines forth more conspicuously in

²⁰ *Confessions I*, Book VII, pp. 385-387.

²¹ *Ibid.*, Book 2, p. 99.

²² *Ibid.*, Book 2, p. 112.

²³ *City of God*, Book VII, p. 247.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Book VIII, pp. 250-252.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Book VII, p. 254.

those sacred writings. But the most striking thing in this connection, and that which most of all inclines me almost to assent to the opinion that Plato was not ignorant of those writings, is the answer which was given to the question elicited from the holy Moses when the words of God were conveyed to him by the angel; for, when he asked what was the name of that God who was commanding him to go and deliver the Hebrew people out of Egypt, this answer was given: "I am who am; and thou shalt say to the children of Israel, He who *is* sent me unto you;" as though compared with Him that truly *is*, because He is unchangeable, those things which have been created mutable *are* not – a truth which Plato vehemently held, and most diligently commended. And I know not whether this sentiment is anywhere to be found in the books of those who were before Plato, unless in that book where it is said, "I am who am; and thou shalt say to the children of Israel, *Who is* sent me unto you."²⁸

Augustine freely admitted that the concept of immutability was a Platonic idea. When he referenced these philosophers, he meant the Platonic philosophers, and he mentioned Plato. He then attempted to draw an analogy between these philosophical concepts and God's word with a shameless allegorizing of Moses. What is the biblical evidence?

Augustine cited Exodus 3:14: And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" The exact meaning of God's name is debatable. Durham wrote, "The verbs are first person common qal imperfects of the verb . . . "to be," connoting continuing, unfinished action: "I am being that I am being,"²⁹ Walvoord & Zuck wrote, "In Moses' second objection he felt the Israelites would challenge his assertion that God had **sent** him to deliver them. **God** told **Moses** to tell them, **I am who I am** (אני הנה אני אהיה אהיה, 3:14; cf. "I will be," אהיה אהיה, v. 12) and **I AM** (אני הנה אני אהיה) **has sent me to you** (v. 14). This One said He would be with His people in their time of trouble and need. אהיה אהיה is probably a wordplay on Yahweh (**LORD**) in verse 15."³⁰ Exodus 3:12 emphasizes the future meaning of (אני הנה אני אהיה אהיה) So He said, "I will certainly be (אני הנה אני אהיה אהיה) with you. And this *shall be* a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain." In this passage, there is certainly no reference to immutability. The meaning seems to be a reference to the future existence of God. We must realize that citing verses with obscure meanings is hardly proof of a major doctrinal concept. Remember that Augustine used philosophical rationalism as proof of his doctrine of Immutability. Reasoning is a dependable tool to systematize the biblical material to help us understand what it means. However, Augustine's foundation was Platonic not biblical.

It is true that Augustine utilized Scripture in his defense of the immutability of God, but Scripture was a secondary proof. We must remember that Augustine could only accept an allegorized Bible:

Those things which our faith holds and which reason in whatever way has traced out, are fortified by the testimonies of the divine Scriptures, so that those who by reason of feebler intellect are not able to comprehend these things, may believe the divine authority, and so may deserve to know. . . . Accordingly that God is unchangeable.³¹

We must remember that Augustine maintained that reason traced out the doctrine of immutability.

Augustine and Aristotle

Aristotle (384-322 BC) was a disciple of Plato. We find the concept of the Immovable God who is the prime mover in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Aristotle's Immovable God moves all things or causes all things to happen but he himself is not caused or moved by anything. Aristotle confirmed the Platonic doctrine of an Immutable God. The following passages are illustrative:

The first principle and primary reality is immovable, both essentially and accidentally, but it excites the primary form of motion, which is one and eternal. Now since that which is moved must be moved by

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Book VIII, pp. 256-257.

²⁹ Durham, John I. *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 3: Exodus*. Dallas, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1998.

³⁰ Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Pub., Inc., 1983, 1985.

³¹ "Concerning the Nature of the Good," *Basic Writings of St. Augustine*, New York: Random House, p. 440.

something, and the prime mover must be essentially immovable Therefore the prime mover which is immovable, is one both in formula and number Clearly, then it thinks that which is most divine and estimable, and does not change; for the change would be for the worse.³²

Augustine mentioned this concept of immovability in his commentary on fate:

But an order of causes in which the highest efficiency is attributed to the will of God, we neither deny nor do we designate it by the name of fate, unless, perhaps, we may understand fate to mean that which is spoken. . . . Once hath He spoken, is to be understood as meaning “immovably” that is unchangeably all things which shall be, and all things which He will do. . . . though there is for God a certain order for all causes . . . in that order of causes which is certain to God, and is embraced by His foreknowledge.³³

Augustine said all things which happen are caused by the immovable God. This immovable God must be Aristotle’s Prime Mover because all things are caused by his god. After perusing the Bible we can confidently declare, it does not speak of an immovable God. In fact, the opposite is true. The God of the Bible, our God, is moved by our prayers, our suffering, and our actions.

Augustine and Plotinus

In Saint Augustine’s Confessions, we find that Augustine saw many similarities between Catholicism and Platonism: “whereas in the Platonists, God and his word are everywhere implied.”³⁴ Historians believe that the books which Augustine read were most likely the *Enneads* of Plotinus. Augustine mentioned Plotinus (about 205-269) twice in his work *The City of God*.³⁵ Other references to the Platonists seem to include the Neo-Platonist, Plotinus³⁶, since Augustine had such a high opinion of him: “Plotinus, whose memory is quite recent, enjoys the reputation of having understood Plato better than any other of his disciples.”³⁷

Therefore, we see that Plotinus was a Neoplatonic philosopher with whom Augustine was well acquainted. The concept of atemporality, God being in the state of Eternal Now, was developed with Plotinus’ influence. We see that clearly in Augustine’s exposition of the Eternal Now. Let us examine the parallel thoughts of Plotinus and Augustine.

The concept that for God there is no past or future, only present

Plotinus:

one sees eternity in seeing a life that abides in the same, and always has the all present to it, not now this, and then again that, but all things at once, and not now some things, and then again others, but a partless completion. . . . Necessarily there will be no “was” about it, for what is there that was for it and has passed away? Nor any “will be,” for what will be for it? So there remains for it only to be in its being just what it is. That, then, which was not, and will not be, but is only, which has being which is static by not changing to the “will be,” nor ever having changed, this is eternity.³⁸

Augustine:

so that of those things which emerge in time, the future indeed, are not yet, and the present are now, and the past no longer are; but all of these are by Him comprehended in His stable and eternal presence . . . but

³² Aristotle, *Metaphysic*, Loeb Classical Library, Book XII, pp. 153,161,165.

³³ *The City of God*, Book V, p. 154.

³⁴ *Confessions*, Book VIII, p. 409.

³⁵ Book IX, Chapter 10 and Book X, Chapter 2.

³⁶ *Eerdmans*, pp. 45-48. The Neo-Platonist, “Plotinus (about 205-269) made a journey to the East and returned with an arsenal of monistic ideas against the rapidly-growing Christian church in the Roman Empire. To claim the Greek philosophical heritage he included some ideas from Plato, his system of contemplation was identical with the yoga of Hindu monism. Plotinus failed to rally the Roman Empire against Jesus Christ, but he was rediscovered and introduced through the back door many centuries later.”

³⁷ *The City of God*, Book IX, p. 289.

³⁸ Plotinus, *Ennead*, The Loeb Classical Library, Book III, p. 305, trans. by A.H. Armstrong.

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beholds all things with absolute unchangeableness.

Plotinus said the eternal does not have a “was” (past) or a “will be” (future) but only an “is” (present). Since God exists in an eternal state, according to Plotinus, the past, present and future should all be viewed as existing in that one present state. Augustine agreed. He said that God exists in an eternal present in which the future and the past are comprehended as existing now.

The concept that in the Eternal Now there is no change

Plotinus: “which is static by not changing to the ‘will be,’ nor ever having changed”⁴⁰

Augustine: “but beholds all things with absolute unchangeableness”⁴¹

The concept of immutability again played a crucial role in the development of the doctrine of atemporality. According to Augustine, for God to be immutable, the future can add no knowledge to what he already knows. For Plotinus and Augustine, this unchangeableness is present in the Eternal.

The concept of having no transition of thought

Plotinus: “The life, then, which belongs to that which exists and is in being, all together and full, completely without extension or interval, is that which we are looking for, eternity.”⁴²

Augustine: “For he does not pass from this to that by transition of thought, but beholds all things with absolute unchangeableness”⁴³

Since both Plotinus and Augustine believed no new knowledge could be possible for God, He could have no transition of thought. Again Plotinus believed that there was no extension or interval of thought in eternity. These concepts were clearly developed by the Platonists before Augustine.

All future events which happen are determined by necessity

Plotinus: “But when all the causes are included, everything happens with complete necessity.”⁴⁴

Chance circumstances are not responsible for the good life, but they, too, follow harmoniously on the causes before them, and proceed woven into the chain of causation by so following. The ruling principle weaves all things together, while individual things cooperate on one side or the other according to their nature, as in military commands the general gives the lead and his subordinates work in unity with him . . . everything which results from their interweaving is foreseen, in order that this result may have room to be well placed,⁴⁵

Augustine:

But, as to those who call by the name of fate . . . the whole connection and train of causes which makes everything become what it does become, there is no need that I should labor and strive with them in a merely verbal controversy, since they attribute the so-called order and connection of causes to the will and power of God most high, who is rightly and most truly believed to know all things before they come to pass and to leave nothing unordained. . . . But an order of causes in which the highest efficiency is attributed to the will of God, we neither deny nor do we designate it by the name of fate . . . there is for God a certain order of all causes.⁴⁶

³⁹ *City of God*, Book XI, p. 364.

⁴⁰ *Ennead*, p. 305.

⁴¹ *City of God*, p. 364.

⁴² *Ennead*, p. 305.

⁴³ *City of God*, p. 364.

⁴⁴ Plotinus, *On Destiny*, p. 39.

⁴⁵ Plotinus, *On Providence*, p. 115.

⁴⁶ *City of God*, pp.151,154.

Plotinus, the pagan philosopher, and Augustine, the Catholic theologian, agreed that all events which ever happen have been determined. Plotinus said there is a chain of causation which cooperates with God or the ruling principle to determine future events. Augustine would agree that there is a whole connection and train of causes or order of causes that makes everything happen. According to them, everything that will happen has been predestined and will happen by necessity.

Since the future is determined it can also be foreseen. Plotinus said the diviners or astrologers could foretell the future.⁴⁷ Augustine agreed that the future is foreseen, but he left foreknowledge to God. If the future were not determined from the beginning, then foreknowledge would be impossible.

How the free will of man works with destiny

Plotinus:

So evil deeds are consequences, but follow from necessity; they come from us (i.e. we cause them), and we are not compelled by providence but we connect them, of our own accord, with the works of providence or works derived from providence. The universe is ordered by the generalship of providence . . . everything which results from their interweaving is foreseen . . . But the things you will choose are included in the universal order, because your part is not a mere casual interlude in the All, but you are counted in as just the person you are. But for what reason is a man the sort of person he is? . . . There are two questions which the argument seeks to settle here, one, whether the blame should rest on the maker, if there is one, who determined the moral character of the individual, or on the being which has come into existence itself: . . . For if it is because he (man) was able to be something nobler than he is, if he was able to add something to make himself better, he is responsible to himself for not doing it; . . . so that it seems likely that blame should fall upon the men who have come into being, and that what belongs to providence is on a higher level.⁴⁸

Augustine:

But it does not follow that, though there is for God a certain order of all causes, there must therefore be nothing depending on the free exercise of our own wills, for our wills themselves are included in that order of causes which is certain to God, and is embraced by His foreknowledge, for human wills are also causes of human actions; and He who foreknew all causes of things would certainly among those causes not have been ignorant of our wills. . . . Therefore we are by no means compelled, either, retaining the prescience of God, to take away the freedom of the will, or, retaining the freedom of the will, to deny that He is prescient of future things which is impious. But we embrace both. We faithfully and sincerely confess both.⁴⁹

Plotinus said these determined events are the results of the interweaving of free wills and Providence. These free wills are interwoven into the will of providence to produce everything that will happen. Augustine said that God foresees our freewill and includes this in his predestination. Somehow the free will decisions of man fit into this predestination. It is not evident how this happens. However, what is evident to us is this: Augustine read Plotinus and used his ideas in formulating his Christian theology.

Augustine's advice on Christian instruction

How did Augustine instruct Christians to find this doctrine of the immutability of God? Was it through a study of the Bible? No! It was through the Platonic method of introspection and rational thought. Augustine wrote *Christian Instruction* to explain the norms for expounding Scripture. These principles reveal Augustine's own understanding of the Christian faith. In Book One, Chapter 2, Augustine explained that teaching was concerned with either things or signs. God is a thing and the Scriptures are signs because they signify God.⁵⁰ Augustine thought it was possible to know certain attributes of God without the knowledge of Scripture. One of

⁴⁷ Plotinus, *On Providence*, ch. 6.

⁴⁸ *On Providence*, pp. 115-121,129.

⁴⁹ *City of God*, p. 154-157.

⁵⁰ Augustine, "On Christian Instruction," *The Fathers of the Church*, Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Of America Press, Inc., 1966, Book 1, ch. 2.

these attributes is the immutability of God. Augustine explained how all men conceive of God:

When the one God of gods is thought of, even by those who believe in, invoke, and worship other gods “whether in heaven or earth,” He is considered in such a way that the very thought tries to conceive a nature which is more excellent and more sublime than all others.⁵¹

What is the more excellent thought? Augustine continued to reflect on the attributes of God without the benefit of Scriptures. He wrote:

When they have seen that even this life is still changeable, they are compelled to prefer something unchangeable to it, that very Life, in fact, which is not sometimes foolish and at other times wise, but is rather Wisdom itself. For a wise mind, that is, one that has attained wisdom, was not wise before it attained it; but Wisdom Itself was never unwise, nor can It ever be. If men did not perceive this, they would not, with the utmost trust, esteem an unchangeable wise life above a changeable one. Indeed, they see that the very rule of truth, according to which they claim the unchangeable life is better, is itself unchangeable. They do not perceive this rule anywhere except beyond their own nature, since they perceive that they are changeable beings.⁵²

Then Augustine wrote:

No one is so shamelessly foolish as to say: “How do you know that an unchangeably wise life should be preferred to a changeable one?” For, the very point that he is inquiring about-how I know-is universally and unchangeably evident for all to see.⁵³

Notice what Augustine said about his method of finding the truth about immutability. He said that men know that God is unchangeable (immutable) because it is universally evident. In addition the unchangeable is better because it is a rule of truth that they perceive in their own nature. Augustine believed that all men without the benefit of the Scriptures or revelation of God understand that God is immutable.

Augustine was simply conforming to the Neoplatonic thought of his age. These are certainly not universal truths evident today. Augustine was revealing his own epistemology.⁵⁴ Augustine first believed in God as immutable. He obtained this concept from Neoplatonic philosophy. Then he transferred this belief into his Christian faith.

The Evidence

We have seen the following evidence for Greek philosophical influence over Augustine’s theology:

1. Augustine was converted only after Ambrose allegorized and spiritualized the Scriptures so they did not repudiate the Platonic, immutable God.
2. Augustine found the immutable God through Platonic meditation.
3. Augustine believed Platonic philosophers were close to Christian beliefs.
4. Augustine could not support his theological views on immutability from the Bible.
5. Augustine showed a tendency to quote Aristotelian ideas.
6. Augustine copied the ideas of Plotinus into his Christian theology.
7. Augustine advised theology students that the attribute of immutability was found through Platonic introspection.

Chapter 3 Augustine and Calvin

We have seen that Augustine was greatly influenced by Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus. We have seen that Augustine had great influence over Calvin according to Benjamin Warfield. John Calvin wrote a lot about

⁵¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁵² *Op. cit.*, p. 33.

⁵³ *Op. cit.*, p. 34.

⁵⁴ “The theory or science of the method or grounds of knowledge.”, *The Oxford Universal Dictionary*, London, 1955.

God's attributes and His immutable counsels in his monumental work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Although he is still highly regarded for this work and his tremendous wealth of biblical knowledge displayed in his commentaries and other writings, I believe he made many statements under the influence of Augustine's philosophy. They were claims unsubstantiated by God's word. In this chapter, I want to address many of Calvin's statements about God and God's alleged decrees. Calvin wrote:

By that immutable counsel of God, by which he predestined to himself whomever he would, was alone effectual for their salvation. That Scripture clearly proves this much, that God by his eternal and immutable counsel determined once for all those whom it was his pleasure one day to admit to salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, it was his pleasure to doom to destruction.⁵⁵ "Because his immutable decree had once for all doomed them to destruction."⁵⁶ Where it is said that God repented of having made Saul king, the term change is used figuratively. Shortly after it is added, "The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent, for he is not a man, that he should repent."⁵⁷ In these words, his immutability is plainly asserted without figure.

Calvin did not use biblical proof to make his declaration that God remains unmoved or remains unalterably the same. He made a dogmatic statement that it didn't mean what it said when the Bible stated that God repented or changed His mind. Because the Scriptures disagreed with his Augustinian ideas, he explained that 1 Samuel 15:29 really was "without figure": "And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent. For He *is* not a man, that He should repent." How did he determine that the use in verses 10 and 11 was figurative as well as the use of the word in 35, but the use of the word in verse 29 was "without figure"?

In agreement with Augustine's view of God's immutability is the attribute of aseity. Aseity means, underived or independent existence. I don't know of an Open Theist who would say that God is derived from something else or is dependent on anyone or anything else for His existence. However, aseity is taken to another level by philosophical Calvinists. Dr. Geisler, who is an excellent theologian, still spends a great amount of his book, *Creating God in the Image of Man*, on the philosophical basis of God's attributes. Geisler wrote:

God is pure actuality with no potentiality in his being whatsoever. . . . Whatever has potentiality (potency) needs to be actualized or affected by another. And since God is the ultimate Cause, there is nothing beyond him to actualize any potential he may have. Nor can God actualize his own potential to exist, since this would mean he caused his own existence.⁵⁸

This statement about God's aseity is very much in line with the philosophy permeating determinism. I have shown this influence in chapter two. Does Geisler mean in his statement that nothing outside of God can affect Him? The Bible shows us that we do affect Him. Here is one example. We can grieve Him. Eph 4:30: "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."

When I was attending the University of Illinois, a Christian friend of mine was pastoring a small country church while he was at school. He was taking a course of study that required some units in philosophy. One day he came home. I'll never forget that day in 1952. In his philosophy class, they had such a fixation on Aristotle that he came in singing, sarcastically, "Praise God for Aristotle, from whom all blessings flow." That pagan philosopher was born in 384 BC. He wrote in his book, *Metaphysics*, "There must be something which, existing in full actuality, produces motion without being moved. That something cannot be otherwise than it is in any respect." This means, nothing can affect God. He continued,

It is clear from the foregoing argument that there is some essential individuality that is eternal and immutable and distinct from perceptible things. . . . this individuality must be unaffected by anything and unalterable [then, after making some comments about the divine mind, he wrote,] what it thinks of is what is most divine and most worthy of esteem. And in this It is unchanging, because any change would be for the worse, and would be a kind of motion.

Although Greek philosophy contradicted God's word, it became the intellectual basis of church doctrine. The battle is accelerating today.

⁵⁵ Calvin, John. *Calvin's Institutes*, Book One, Chapter XVII, c2, p. 494.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 522.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 109.

⁵⁸ Geisler, Norman L., *Creating God in the Image of Man?*, Bethany House Publishers, 1997, p. 26.

Compare Calvin's statement with Aristotle's summation: "for there is something which always moves that which is moved, and the prime mover is itself unmoved."⁵⁹ Calvin was influenced by the philosophy of Aristotle and his mentor, Plato. We may not be able to prove their direct influence on him, but we can see that Calvin was seriously influenced by Augustine. As I have shown, Augustine was greatly influenced by these philosophers, especially through Plotinus. Augustine mixed biblical statements with his philosophical thoughts and formed his theology of immutability.

I want to dwell on this point. Why was Calvin certain that God is immutable? Is this plainly asserted in Scripture? Was Calvin certain that God does not repent because the Scripture said so or because of his Platonic influence? Does Scripture show that God is immutable, or just the opposite, that He repents? Where is Calvin's evidence? It is interesting that Calvin dismissed the evidence almost in a cavalier manner when he dealt with the Scriptures that God changes.

Calvin's explanation that "change" is just a figure of speech is unacceptable. Many biblical scholars have distorted some metaphors used in the Bible resulting in a lopsided view of God. We speak metaphorically by using words which describe one subject as a lens to see the other in a more understandable or emotional way, to represent one concept in terms of another because the nature of the two concepts allows an analogy to be drawn. Metaphors really matter because they give us insight into the glorious nature of God. However, theologians have suppressed the truth of many biblical metaphors about God while greatly magnifying others.⁶⁰

The goodness and compassion of God have been neglected. I have seen where they often state, without basis, that a figure of speech does not mean what it actually shows. There is a significant difference between the concepts of "does not change his mind" and "changes his mind". When it says in 1 Samuel 15:11 and 1 Samuel 15:35 that the LORD repented, what does it mean?

1 Sam 15:11 "I repent that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments." And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the LORD all night.

1 Sam 15:35 And Samuel went no more to see Saul until the day of his death. Nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul, and the LORD repented that He had made Saul king over Israel.

Again, what does it mean when the Bible says "the LORD repented that He had made Saul king over Israel"? It is difficult to accept Calvin's statement, especially when in 1 Samuel 15:29, the same word is used to say that the LORD does not repent. "And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent. For He *is* not a man, that He should repent."

If we understand from over thirty places where the word repent is used of God, that the LORD does repent, but in this specific instance God will not change his mind about taking the kingdom away from King Saul, then, the apparent conflict is resolved. However, Calvin used another approach. Calvin was convinced that God is immutable from his studies of Augustine and, therefore, the term change was used figuratively in the 29th verse.

However, Augustine brought in his presuppositions from the influence of Platonic reasoning. Among these presuppositions was the doctrine of the immutability of God. Because of Greek philosophical influence, Augustine thought the idea of a mutable God was an absurdity. Only after Ambrose (c. 340-397), Bishop of Milan, allegorized the Old Testament Scriptures which revealed a mutable God, was Augustine able to accept the Catholic faith. Ambrose allegorized or spiritualized the offending Old Testament Scripture passages in his sermons, and, finally, Augustine was able to accept the Christian God. "For those absurdities which in those Scriptures were wont to offend me, after I had heard divers of them expounded properly, I referred now to the depth of the mystery: yea and the authority of that Book appeared so much the more venerable, and so much more worthy of our religious credit."⁶¹

Augustine's so called absurdities had hindered him from believing in the word of God. Augustine believed that God was immutable. To him it was absurd to believe in a God who could change his mind or be mutable. How did Augustine know that this was absurd? He believed the force of reason explained what was absurd; a reason buttressed by Platonic philosophy. Only after he heard Ambrose, was Augustine able to judge biblical

⁵⁹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book IV, The Loeb Classical Library, trans. by Hugh Tredennick, Harvard University Press, 1933, p. 207.

⁶⁰ Cf. Fretheim, Terence E., *The Suffering of God*, Ch. 1.

⁶¹ Augustine. *St. Augustine's Confessions I*, Loeb Classical Library, Book VI, p. 285, trans. by W. Watts.

authority rational. Augustine only turned to the Scriptures after the absurdities were “expounded properly” by Ambrose. Now he could rely on Scripture for the spiritual help he needed since his reason, according to Augustine, was not able to overcome his sexual desires.⁶² He wrote, “Seeing therefore mankind would prove too weak to find out the truth by the way of evident reason, and for this cause was there need of the authority of Holy Writ”.⁶³

Although Augustine developed a high regard for Scripture later, at first, he allowed reason to dictate his ideas about God’s attributes. Then, he attempted to buttress his ideas with the Scriptures. His primary presupposition was the immutability of God. This doctrine of immutability influenced his doctrines of predestination, foreknowledge, and the atemporality of God. Subsequently these doctrines were absorbed by Calvin. This influence of Augustine over Calvin is attested by Calvinists. Remember Warfield’s statement: “The system of doctrine taught by Calvin is just the Augustinianism common to the whole body of the Reformers—for the Reformation was, as from the spiritual point of view a great revival of Augustinianism.”⁶⁴

Therefore, where did Calvin obtain his conviction that God is immutable? Why did he, without an explanation, dismiss the idea that God could change his mind? Calvin quoted Augustine as a source for immutability. As we have already demonstrated, Augustine received his doctrine of immutability from Plato when he was involved with the Manichaeans for a number of years.

When I was younger, I saw the righteousness and justice of God very clearly. But, because I was under the influence of western civilization’s philosophical thought, I believed in an immutable, unchanging, and impassible, unfeeling God. As I have shown, this philosophy apparently was developed by Socrates, written down by Plato and further developed by Aristotle.

God’s word has continued to transform my life over the years. Now, I have read much of the OT with a different purpose. I wanted to find out who God is. So my question now, is, what is God like? What would God do? We can get an understanding of His person only from the word of God. Notice God’s passion in the following passages.

Just as a parent asks in despair, “What did I do wrong,” God said in **Mic 6:3**, “O My people, what have I done to you? And how have I wearied you? Testify against Me.” Similarly, in **Num 14:27**, He asked Moses and Aaron, “How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who complain against Me? I have heard the complaints which the children of Israel make against Me.” But all His agony is tempered with compassion. For it says in, **Deu 32:36** “For the LORD will judge His people and have compassion on His servants, when He sees that their power is gone, and there is no one remaining, bond or free.” Further, it shows that God was vexed by Israel in **Psa 78:36-41**:

Nevertheless they flattered Him with their mouth, and they lied to Him with their tongue; 37 For their heart was not steadfast with Him, nor were they faithful in His covenant. 38 But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them. Yes, many a time He turned His anger away and did not stir up all His wrath; 39 For He remembered that they were but flesh, a breath that passes away and does not come again. 40 How often they provoked Him in the wilderness and grieved Him in the desert! 41 Yes, again and again they tempted God and limited the Holy One of Israel.

How often did God put up with them compassionately? **Num 14:22,23** tells us:

because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, 23 they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it.”

When we read the Old Testament, we find that God has strong emotions. In **Jer 15:6** it says, “You have forsaken Me,” says the LORD, “You have gone backward. Therefore I will stretch out My hand against you and destroy you; I am weary of repenting!” But we must always remember, according to **Psa 145:8**, “The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy.” And though He said He was weary of repenting, later He said in **Jer 31:1-9**,

⁶² Latourette, Kenneth S., *A History of Christianity*, Harper & Row, 1975, V. I., pp. 96-98.

⁶³ Augustine, *loc. cit.*

⁶⁴ Warfield, B., *Calvin and Augustine*, The Presb. & Reformed Pub. Co., Philadelphia, Pa, 1956, p.22.

“At the same time,” says the LORD, “I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people.” 2 Thus says the LORD: “The people who survived the sword Found grace in the wilderness— Israel, when I went to give him rest.” 3 The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: “Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore with loving kindness I have drawn you. 4 Again I will build you, and you shall be rebuilt, O virgin of Israel! You shall again be adorned with your tambourines, And shall go forth in the dances of those who rejoice. 5 You shall yet plant vines on the mountains of Samaria; The planters shall plant and eat them as ordinary food. 6 For there shall be a day when the watchmen will cry on Mount Ephraim, ‘Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to the LORD our God.’” 7 For thus says the LORD: “Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations; Proclaim, give praise, and say, ‘O LORD, save Your people, the remnant of Israel!’ 8 Behold, I will bring them from the north country, And gather them from the ends of the earth, Among them the blind and the lame, The woman with child And the one who labors with child, together; A great throng shall return there. 9 They shall come with weeping, And with supplications I will lead them. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters, In a straight way in which they shall not stumble; for I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn.

God addressed this rationalism first espoused by Augustine and adopted by Calvin when He inspired Paul to write this about the wisdom of the wise in **1 Co 1:19-21**.

For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.” Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, **the world through wisdom did not know God**, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

This verse contradicts the rationalism propagated by those who influenced Calvinistic theologians. As I have shown, Augustine had been influenced, especially, by Plotinus, a Neoplatonic philosopher. The concept of atemporality – God being in the state of Eternal Now – was reinforced by Plotinus. We saw this influence in the last chapter about Augustine’s exposition of the Eternal Now. They both believed there was no change in the Eternal Now. Plotinus wrote: “which is static by not changing to the ‘will be,’ nor ever having changed”⁶⁵ Augustine similarly stated: “but beholds all things with absolute unchangeableness”⁶⁶

The concept of immutability was always the foundation of Augustine’s theology and played a vital role in the development of the doctrine of atemporality. For God to be immutable, the future could add no knowledge to what God already knows. For Plotinus and Augustine, this unchangeableness is present in the eternal. Modern theologians have denied the basis of their rationalistic theology and even criticized the philosophers by whom they have been influenced. For example, Robert Morey, who “has earned degrees in philosophy, theology and cult evangelism,” wrote this in his chapter on “The God’s of the Philosophers.”

Since it was God who created the world with its space-time limitation, He Himself is not limited by space or time, but *greater* than both. Since He made the space-time universe, it does not make or control God. To say that the creation is greater than the Creator is absurd. This is why Christians have always said that God is eternal in the sense of “timelessness” not “endless time.” To say that God exists in “endless time” is to make time ultimate over God. It would make God depend on time for His own existence. This would make Time a higher god than God!⁶⁷

We must evaluate this short statement. First, it is rationalistic thought which maintains that space and time were created when God created the world. Morey probably got this from the math of the new physics. The Bible always portrays God in space and time, yet it never alludes to space-time exerting any control over Him. Second, pagan philosophers like Plato and Aristotle were the ones who maintained that God was in a state of timelessness. Third, just because God does things one thing at a time, doesn’t make time “ultimate over God.”

⁶⁵ *Ennead*, p.305.

⁶⁶ *The City of God*, p. 364.

⁶⁷ Robert Morey, *Battle of the Gods*, p. 50. Augustine wrote in, *The City of God*, Book XV, p. 515, “The anger of God is not a disturbing emotion of His mind, but a judgment by which punishment is inflicted upon sin. His thought and reconsideration also are the unchangeable reason which changes things; for He does not, like man, repent of anything He has done, because in all matters His decision is as inflexible as His prescience is certain.” All these dogmatic statements were driven by his philosophical presuppositions. Scripture contradicts many of his statements.

The Bible described God doing things in sequence, one day at a time in the creation account. That put no limitation on Him. We are slaves to time because we need to sleep, eat, and eventually we die. God faces none of these. Time is no burden to God. “With the LORD one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Pe 3:8).

Plato developed the thought of Heraclitus, Xenophanes, and Parmenides into his thesis of the immutability of God. We can understand the biblical concept of the immutability of God by using a biblically based syllogism. This time we will start with a perfect God since **Mat 5:48** says “your Father in heaven is perfect.”

God is perfect.
God changes.
The perfect God changes.

Even though all of Christianity has been influenced by Greek philosophy, that is changing. Many Calvinists think, a perfect God can't suffer. But we have seen He is able. When tragedy strikes, when pain pierces deep – we are not the only ones who suffer. God suffers deeper than all of us put together. We have seen that the idea of God's impassibility came from philosophy, not the Bible.

Warren McWilliams wrote in his evaluation of God's impassibility:

Despite the emphasis on divine passion in the Bible, early Christian theologians gradually agreed on divine impassibility as the orthodox position. This development has been the target of most proponents of divine passibility, who generally agree that the main culprit responsible for the shift from passibility to impassibility is Greek metaphysics. Greek philosophers (e.g., Plato, Aristotle, Parmenides, the Stoics) developed an understanding of deity as immutable, self-sufficient, impassible, and static. Christian theologians eventually used these philosophical categories to describe God, even though this usually led to a distortion of God's nature. God appeared more and more like Aristotle's unmoved mover, for example, rather than the passionate, dynamic Yahweh of biblical faith. Only within the last couple of centuries has there been a genuine recovery of the biblical emphasis on divine suffering.⁶⁸

Many Calvinists say, “God can't feel and can't change.” Because of this, He can't love, can't suffer, and can't be influenced. However, the Bible says frequently – He does love; He does suffer; He is influenced by prayer; and He does repent or change. In fact, we know He loved the world so much that He gave Himself. He doesn't make us ascend out of our pain in this life. On the contrary, He descends into it, shares it with us, and strengthens us through it. What a God! Look at the following passages: “Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered” (**Heb 5:8**). “Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate” (**Heb 13:12**). “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example . . . Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth; Who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously” (**1 Pe 2:21-23**). “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit” (**1 Pe 3:18**). “Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin” (**1 Pe 4:1**). Therefore, we must conclude that the impassibility of God is not found in the Bible. It is only found in rationalistic thinking influenced by Greek philosophy.

Calvinism has had a stifling influence on a number of important functions of the body of Christ. Evangelism has been crippled to a great extent. Fortunately we have many Calvinists who are inconsistent. Their theology does not influence their actions. But I have witnessed first hand the attitude of a youth director I overheard, speaking to a youth leader from his church. He told his colleague, “We don't have to worry about getting any of our youth saved, because Pastor says, ‘If they are elect, they will get saved by God, if they aren't elect, nothing you or they can do will get them saved.’”

Counseling is also a problem. Why counsel if everything is already determined by God? However, there is another side to counseling. Many Christians with whom I have counseled said that God took a loved one. Then, some of them had turned against God for being so cruel, and their lives were destroyed. I'm happy to share with these people the biblical view of our loving God. Finally, the whole notion of determinism is absurd. It's obvious to everyone that we make choices, otherwise why would Calvinists try so hard to excommunicate those

⁶⁸ McWilliams, Warren, *The Passion of God*, Mercer University Press, 1985, pp. 10,11.

of us who hold to the biblical concept that God is able to change?
Check and see if the following is included in this or other of the 1st 4 chapters

As proof that God remains unalterably the same Calvin declares that God remains unmoved. Compare this statement with Aristotle (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book IV, The Loeb Classical Library, trans. by Hugh Tredennick, Harvard University Press, 1933, p. 207) “for there is something which always moves that which is moved, and the prime mover is itself unmoved.” Calvin obviously is borrowing his ideas from Aristotle, a pupil of Plato, and mixing them with his theology of immutability.

Why is Calvin certain that God is immutable? Is this plainly asserted in Scripture? All of the occurrences of the Hebrew word for repent are listed in this book. God is said not to repent six times. Twenty references refer to God repenting. Is Calvin certain that God does not repent because of Scripture or because of his Platonic influence?

Does Scripture prove God’s immutable counsel. Where is this clear evidence? It is interesting that when Calvin is presented with the evidence that God changes he dismisses it lightly.

Calvin’s explanation that “change” is just a figure of speech is unacceptable. A figure of speech is used to represent one concept in terms of another because the nature of the two concepts allows an analogy to be drawn. There is no analogy between the concepts of “does not change his mind” and “changes his mind”.

The Niphal form of the Hebrew word *naham* is used in 1 Samuel 15:11 and 1 Samuel 15:35 to mean that the Lord repented. However in 1 Samuel 15:29 the same word is used to say that the Lord does not repent. If we understand that the Lord does not repent but that in this specific instance God will not change his mind the apparent conflict is easily explained. However Calvin uses another approach. Calvin is convinced that God is immutable and therefore the term change is used figuratively with God. Where does Calvin obtain his conviction that God is immutable? Why does he dismiss without an explanation the idea that God could change his mind?

Calvin quotes Augustine as a source for immutability. As we have already demonstrated Augustine received his doctrine of Immutability from Plato.

Chapter 4

The Biblical Basis of God’s Mutability and Passibility

I must begin this section with a statement about God. God does not change in His being. The Bible clearly tells us that God is immutable. God presents himself as the unchanging God of Israel in Ex 3:14. “God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”” This name implies that He exists without change in His person. Psalm 102:25-27 portrays God this way: “Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. 26 They will perish, but You will endure; Yes, they will all grow old like a garment; Like a cloak You will change them, and they will be changed. 27 But You are the same, and Your years will have no end.” However, many Calvinistic theologians go far beyond the statements of Scripture. That distinguished scholar, R.C. Sproul wrote:

I began the class by reading the opening lines from Chapter III of the Westminster Confession: “*God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass.*” I stopped reading at that point. I asked, “Is there anyone in this room who does not believe the words that I just read?” A multitude of hands went up. I then asked, “Are there any convinced atheists in the room?” No hands were raised. I then said something outrageous: “Everyone who raised his hand to the first question should also have raised his hand to the second question.” A chorus of groans and protests met my statement. How could I accuse someone of atheism for not believing that God foreordains whatever comes to pass? Those who protested these words were not denying the existence of God. They were not protesting against Christianity. They were protesting against Calvinism. I tried to

explain to the class that the idea that God foreordains whatever comes to pass is not an idea unique to Calvinism. It isn't even unique to Christianity. It is simply a tenet of theism – a necessary tenet of theism. That God in some sense foreordains whatever comes to pass is a necessary result of his sovereignty. In itself it does not plead for Calvinism. It only declares that God is absolutely sovereign over his creation. God can foreordain things in different ways. But everything that happens must at least happen by his permission. If he permits something, then he must decide to allow it. If He decides to allow something, then in a sense he is foreordaining it. Who, among Christians, would argue that God could not stop something in this world from happening? If God so desires, he has the power to stop the whole world. To say that God foreordains all that comes to pass is simply to say that God is sovereign over his entire creation. If something could come to pass apart from his sovereign permission, then that which came to pass would frustrate his sovereignty. If God refused to permit something to happen and it happened anyway, then whatever caused it to happen would have more authority and power than God himself. If there is any part of creation outside of God's sovereignty, then God is simply not sovereign. If God is not sovereign, then God is not God. **If there is one single molecule in this universe running around loose, totally free of God's sovereignty, then we have no guarantee that a single promise of God will ever be fulfilled. Perhaps that one maverick molecule will lay waste all the grand and glorious plans that God has made and promised to us.**⁶⁹ If a grain of sand in the kidney of Oliver Cromwell changed the course of English history, so our maverick molecule could change the course of all redemption history. Maybe that one molecule will be the thing that prevents Christ from returning. We've heard the story: For want of a nail the shoe was lost; for want of the shoe the horse was lost; for want of the horse the rider was lost; for want of the rider the battle was lost; for want of the battle the war was lost. I remember my distress when I heard that Bill Vukovich, the greatest car driver of his era, was killed in a crash in the Indianapolis 500. The cause was later isolated in the failure of a cotter pin that cost ten cents. Bill Vukovich had amazing control of race cars. He was a magnificent driver. However, he was not sovereign. A part worth only a dime cost him his life. God doesn't have to worry about ten-cent cotter pins wrecking his plans. There are no maverick molecules running around loose. God is sovereign. God is God. My students began to see that divine sovereignty is not an issue peculiar to Calvinism, or even to Christianity. Without sovereignty God cannot be God. If we reject divine sovereignty then we must embrace atheism. This is the problem we all face. We must hold tightly to God's sovereignty. making Yet we must do it in such a way so as not to violate human freedom. At this point I should do for you what I did for my students in the evening class—finish the statement from the Westminster Confession. The whole statement reads as follows: *“God, from all eternity, did by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.”* Note that, while it affirms God's sovereignty over all things, the Confession also asserts that God does not do evil or violate human freedom. Human freedom and evil are under God's sovereignty.⁷⁰

We must realize that the Confession makes this statement without including exegetical proof from God's word because it is a doctrinal statement. We will evaluate the Confession point by point in these areas and show that the Scriptures do not sustain a great amount of the statements made.

Another quote is from L. Berkhof in *Systematic Theology*.

God . . . is devoid of all change, not only in His Being, but also in His perfections, and in His purposes and promises. [He further makes a case, because of this.], He is . . . free from all . . . growth or decay in His Being or perfections. His knowledge and plans, His moral principles and volitions remain forever the same. **Even reason teaches us that no change is possible in God, since a change is either for better or for worse.**⁷¹ . . . there is no change in His . . . attributes, His purpose, His motives of action, or His promises. . . .

⁶⁹ All **bold** is my emphasis. Although Dr. Sproul does not mean to, he is degrading the awesome power of God. God can handle the whole universe with ease. He doesn't have to look into the future to figure out how to keep a deviant molecule or the whole cosmos in order. We can understand God's sovereignty over the universe without creating a God who does not really love the whole world, care for all the lost, and desire for all men to be saved.

⁷⁰ Sproul, R. C., *Chosen by God*, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986. Electronic book, pp. 5,6. His italics.

⁷¹ Plato said ⁷¹“that to be altered and moved by something else happens least to things that are in the best condition . . . that the

His repenting, changing His intention, and altering His relation to sinners . . . is only an anthropopathic way of speaking. In reality the change is not in God, but in man and in man's relations to God.⁷²

An anthropopathism is attributing the passion of man to God. I admit that this is an anthropopathism. But we use these metaphors to illuminate our understanding not darken it so it is the opposite of the truth. Is it true that God never changes His plans or never changes His way of dealing with man? No, because the Bible states in over thirty times that God repents or changes His mind.

That eminent scholar, Dr. Norman Geisler, wrote about God's impassibility in the following passage of his book, *Creating God in the Image of Man?*

Another classical attribute of God, one that comes under particular criticism from contemporary neotheists, is impassability [*sic*]. God is without passion. For passion implies desire for what one does not have. But God, as an absolutely perfect being, has everything. He lacks nothing. For in order to lack something he would need to have a potentiality to possess it. But God is pure actuality, as we have said, with no potentiality whatsoever. Therefore, God has no passion for anything. He is completely and infinitely perfect in himself. However, to say that God is impassable [*sic*] in the sense that he has no passions or cravings for fulfillment is not to say that he has no feeling. God feels anger at sin and rejoices in righteousness. But God's feelings are unchanging. He always, unchangingly, feels the same sense of anger at sin. And, likewise, he never ceases to rejoice in goodness and righteousness. Thus, God has no changing passions, but he does have unchanging feelings.⁷³

But when Dr. Geisler wrote, "But God's feelings are unchanging. He always, unchangingly, feels the same sense of anger at sin.", I wonder how Dr. Geisler got that idea. I do not find it in the Bible. Instead, in Num 11:1-3 it appears that the Lord had different levels of anger: "Now *when* the people complained, **it displeased the LORD**; for the LORD heard *it*, and **His anger was aroused**. So **the fire of the LORD burned among them**, and consumed *some* in the outskirts of the camp. 2 Then the people cried out to Moses, and when Moses prayed to the LORD, **the fire was quenched**. 3 So he called the name of the place Taberah, because the fire of the LORD had burned among them." The same idea appears in Psa 78:38 But He, *being* full of compassion, forgave *their* iniquity, and did not destroy *them*. Yes, many a time He turned His anger away, and **did not stir up all His wrath**.

From the following passage and dictionary citations it is clear that the word means a change of mind or heart. However, God changes His mind because of mercy, compassion, or righteous judgment. The most obvious passage that God changed his mind is Gen 6:5-9

Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord grieved [repented *nacham* in the nifal] that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved [I. (wayit`atseeb, from OT:6087 `atsab) vb. hurt, pain, grieve — Qal *pain*; *hurt*. Nifal *be pained* . . . *be hurt*; *be grieved*. Pi. *vexed*. Hiph. *cause pain*. Hithp. *be vexed*.] in His heart. So the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorrowful (It repented me. Nifal of *nacham*.) that I have made them. But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God.

It is a mistaken and subjective judgment call that the nifal here is translated grieved or sorrowful when God changed His mind about the man that He created. It already used the word `atsab to show His grief. Besides being grieved, He also repented that He had made man: "And the Lord repented [*nacham* in the nifal] that He had made man on the earth . . . I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I repent [Again, *nacham* in the nifal] that I have made them." I realize that theology drives translation, so when we look at all the times *nacham* is used for God, we get a better

healthiest and strongest is least altered. . . . that those which are well made and in good condition are least liable to be changed by time and other influences. . . . But God, surely and everything that belongs to God is in every way in the best possible state. . . . Then does he change himself for the better . . . or for the worse? It must necessarily, said he, be for the worse if he is changed . . . the gods themselves are incapable of change.

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L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965, pp. 58,59

⁷³

Geisler, Norman L., *Creating God in the Image of Man?*, Bethany House Publishers, 1997, p. 29.

picture.⁷⁴

When Israel implored Aaron to make the golden calf to worship, God's statement to Moses in Ex 32:10 was, "Now therefore, **let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot** against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation." If God's wrath was always hot, why would He say that His wrath would become hot? The only thing that counts in true biblical theology is God's word. Therefore, we must look at the biblical evidence.

The foundation of the Calvinistic view of predestination is immutability. I have shown the philosophical basis of the concept of immutability and impassibility. The basis is Greek philosophy. Is God impassible – not influenced by our problems? Does God ever change? The question is not whether God changes in His character or attributes. He doesn't. He is omnipotent. He is always holy. God is light. God is omniscient. God is love. But, again, that is not the question. The question can be stated in a number of ways: Does God ever repent? Does God change His mind? Does God think something will happen, and then it doesn't? Does God show emotion? Does He change in any way in the state of His being?

I believe the answer to all these questions is, yes, God does change! These ideas, instead of degrading God, should cause us to appreciate and glorify Him. He does repent. He does change His mind. He does say some things will happen, and then they don't. He does show emotion. He does change in the state of His mind at these times. But the most significant fact for me concerns His supposed impassibility, because, He does suffer. In other words, He has passion. This is the opposite of having no passion – impassibility.

Let us begin our study of impassibility with a biblical statement about God. God grieves! What comfort that gives me. Our God is touched by our sufferings. God suffers because of us, with us, and for us. For instance, in **Hos 11:1-4,7-9** it says,

When Israel *was* a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son. 2 As they called them, So they went from them; They sacrificed to the Baals, and burned incense to carved images. 3 I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms; But they did not know that I healed them. 4 I drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love, and I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped and fed them. 7 My people are bent on backsliding from Me. Though they call to the Most High, none at all exalt Him. 8 How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I set you like Zeboiim? **My heart churns within Me;** My sympathy is stirred. 9 I will not execute the fierceness of My anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim. For I am God, and not man, the Holy One in your midst; And I will not come with terror.

What can "**My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred.**" mean if it doesn't show our wonderful God is passionate? Because this passage conflicts with the assumptions about God they inherited from pagan Greek philosophy, Calvinists call these two emotional statements by God anthropopathisms. Of course they are anthropopathisms but, again, what does the anthropopathism mean? They think their anthropopathism answers the problem. Should we believe God's inspired statements in the Bible or should we look to philosophers' statements about God and change the meaning of the Bible to agree with them? I believe we must start with the biblical material and systematize it in an orderly way and then draw the conclusions. This is what I intend to do.

The next example of God's passion we observe is God as the loving husband in **Hos 1:2; 2:5,13; 3:1; 6:4.**

The LORD said to Hosea: "Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry, for the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the LORD." **2:5** "For their mother has played the harlot; She

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Since nacham is only found in the nifal when it refers to God I will list only the nifal definitions. Strongs 5162. Here is Louw-Nida: 5714 נִחַם 'n: v. Louw-Nida Domain Definition 25.146–25.155 (nif) comforted, i.e., be in a state or condition of finding a measure of relief from sorrow and distress, and so be consoled or encouraged (Ge 24:67; Ps 77:3[EB 2]; Jer 31:15); (nif) change one's mind, reconsider, i.e., change one's opinion concerning truth (1Sa 15:29 (2xs)); (nif) be grieved, i.e., be in a state of sorrow or regret over a person or event (Ge 6:6, 7; Jdg 21:6, 15; 1Sa 15:11, 35; 2Sa 24:16; 1Ch 21:15; Jer 42:10) . . . (nif) repent, i.e., be in a state of sorrow and regret about a wrong, implying a true understanding about a wrong and desire to change a thought or behavior (Job 42:6; Jer 8:6; 31:19) . . . (nif) relent, i.e., to cease a particular course of action, usually with a focus that a gracious act has occurred, with a possible implication that one grieves or has sorrow over an object or event, . . . (Ex 32:12, 14; Ps 106:45; Isa 57:6; Jer 4:28; 18:8; 26:3, 13, 19; Eze 24:14; Joel 2:13; Am 7:3, 6; Jnh 4:2+), note: some sources also place here an implication that this is a change of opinion concerning truth, but the contexts focus on future merciful behaviors and actions

Brown, Driver & Briggs nacham, vb. Niph. be sorry, console oneself, etc. (only in der. species) — Niph. 1. *be sorry, moved to pity, have compassion*, for others, abs.; . . . 2. *be sorry, rue, suffer grief, repent*, of one's own doings, abs.; . . . for ill done to others . . .

who conceived them has behaved shamefully. For she said, ‘I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink.’” **2:13** “She decked herself with her earrings and jewelry, and went after her lovers; but Me she forgot,” says the LORD. **3:1** “Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the love of the LORD for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans.” **6:4** “O Ephraim, **what shall I do to you?** O Judah, **what shall I do to you?** For your faithfulness is like a morning cloud, and like the early dew it goes away.”

You may think, a perfect God can’t suffer. But the Bible shows it is true. When tragedy strikes, when pain pierces deep – we are not the only ones who suffer. God suffers longer and deeper than all of us put together. Where did this idea, that God can’t suffer, come from? It came from philosophy, not the Bible. According to **Rom 5:8**, this almighty God, “demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Again, in **Heb 2:9-18** it shows that He suffered for us. Therefore, from just the above passages, we must conclude that the impassibility of God is not found in the Bible. It is found only in rationalistic thinking influenced by Plotinus, Augustine, Aquinas, but primarily, Greek philosophy.

Immutability is discussed much more frequently than impassibility by modern theologians. It is similar to impassibility. Again, it means unchanging. There are some portions of Scripture which say God does not change. For instance, **Mal 3:6** says “For I am the Lord, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.” Is this passage making an unqualified statement that God never changes? No! Instead, this passage addresses God’s trustworthiness. He is not going to go back on His promise to David even though David’s people have become extremely corrupt. Malachi 3:6 is not a general statement about God’s immutability. Instead of a general statement, it means He is not going back on His specific promise to David. That’s what **Psa 132:10,11** shows: “For Your servant David’s sake, do not turn away the face of Your anointed. 11 The Lord has sworn in truth to David. He will not turn from it: ‘I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body.’” This statement in Malachi, then, is made because of God’s specific promise to David.

Psalm 89 is the most comprehensive passage showing God’s faithfulness in His promise to David as recorded in Malachi:

2 For I have said, “Mercy shall be built up forever; Your faithfulness You shall establish in the very heavens. **3** I have made **a covenant** [unconditional] with My chosen, I have **sworn** to My servant David: **4** ‘Your seed I will establish forever, and build up your throne to all generations.’” Selah **5** And the heavens will praise Your wonders, O LORD; Your faithfulness also in the assembly of the saints. **20** I have found My servant David; With My holy oil I have anointed him, **21** with whom My hand shall be established; Also My arm shall strengthen him. **24** But My faithfulness and My mercy *shall be* with him, and in My name his horn shall be exalted. **27** Also I will make him *My* firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. **28** My mercy I will keep for him forever, and My covenant shall stand firm with him. **29** His seed also I will make *to endure* forever, and his throne as the days of heaven. **30** If his sons forsake My law and do not walk in My judgments, **31** if they break My statutes and do not keep My commandments, **32** then I will punish their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. **33** **Nevertheless My lovingkindness I will not utterly take from him, nor allow My faithfulness to fail.** **34** My covenant I will not break, nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips. **35** Once I have **sworn** by My holiness; I will not lie to David: **36** His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before Me; **37** It shall be established forever like the moon, Even *like* the faithful witness in the sky.” Selah.

Further, in **Jer 33:17,20-22**, it says:

For thus says the LORD: “David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel.” **20** Thus says the LORD: “If you can break My covenant with the day and My covenant with the night, so that there will not be day and night in their season, **21** then My covenant may also be broken with David My servant, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and with the Levites, the priests, My ministers. **22** As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, nor the sand of the sea measured, so will I multiply the descendants of David My servant and the Levites who minister to Me.

This should be enough to show that God made a specific, unconditional promise to David. He will not go back on His covenant with David. That’s what it means in **Mal 3:6** when He said “For I am the LORD, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.” God will not alter His promise to David.

Some Scripture shows God’s anguish over Israel’s ungodly behavior. God was speaking about Israel and Judah like this in **Jer 3:6-10**:

The Lord said also to me in the days of Josiah the king: “Have you seen what backsliding Israel has done? She has gone up on every high mountain and under every green tree, and there played the harlot. 7 And **I said, after she had done all these things, [‘She will’]⁷⁵ return to Me.’ But she did not return.** And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. 8 Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also. 9 So it came to pass, through her casual harlotry, that she defiled the land and committed adultery with stones and trees. 10 And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah has not turned to Me with her whole heart, but in pretense,” says the Lord.

God thought or said⁷⁶ that Israel would return to Him. He expected Israel to return. But Israel grieved Him again. She did not return.

In a similar manner, God spoke of Israel in **Isaiah 5:1-4**:

Now let me sing to my Well-beloved a song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard: My Well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. He dug it up and cleared out its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, and also made a winepress in it; so He expected it to bring forth good grapes. But it brought forth wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge, please, between Me and My vineyard. **What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes?**

God was grieved by their response to His graciousness. He expected good fruit, but there was none. God did all He could do with free agents. “What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it?” They rebelled.

Further, the New Testament shows us that the Holy Spirit can be grieved, in **Eph 4:30**: “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”

Finally, on this subject, some of God’s actions with Hezekiah are related in **2 Kings 20:1-6**. God emphatically told Hezekiah that he was going to die.

In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him, “**Thus says the Lord: ‘Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live.’**” Then he turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the Lord, saying, “Remember now, O Lord, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done what was good in Your sight.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly. And it happened, before Isaiah had gone out into the middle court, that the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “Return and tell Hezekiah the leader of My people, ‘Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father: **‘I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will heal you.** On the third day you shall go up to the house of the Lord. And I will add to your days fifteen years.’”

Hezekiah prayed, and the Lord responded. This certainly is not the impassible, immutable God of Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin.

Some Passages Where Man Repents - Nacham

Ex 13:17 Then it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest **perhaps** the people **change their minds** when they see war, and return to Egypt.

Job 42:6 Therefore I abhor myself, And **repent** in dust and ashes.

Jer 8:6 I listened and heard, but they do not speak aright. No man **repented** of his wickedness, saying, what have I done? Everyone turned to his own course, as the horse rushes into the battle.

Jer 31:19 Surely, after my turning, **I repented**; And after I was instructed, I struck myself on the thigh; I was ashamed, yes, even humiliated, because I bore the reproach of my youth.

Nacham Used When God Repents

Gen 6:4-9 There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and

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My modification of the New King James is based upon the Hebrew, *tishub*; the *qal* imperfect, third person feminine singular. According to Craigie, Kelley, & Drinkard in the *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 26: Jeremiah 1-25*. Dallas, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1998, it should be translated, “God thought that after Israel’s folly, the nation would *return* (v 7, in effect, ‘repent’), but she did not *return*”. Also confer the following translations: **ASV**, And I said after she had done all these things, she will return unto me; but she returned not: and her treacherous sister Judah saw it. **Darby**, And I said, after she hath done all these things, she will return unto me; but she returned not. And her sister Judah, the treacherous, saw it. **NASB**, And I thought, “After she has done all these things, she will return to Me”; but she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it. **NIV**, I thought that after she had done all this she would return to me but she did not, and her unfaithful sister Judah saw it. **NRSV**, And I thought, “After she has done all this she will return to me”; but she did not return, and her false sister Judah saw it.

⁷⁶

The Hebrew word is *wayamar*, “and I said”. Some translate it, “and I thought”. Either translation is acceptable to me.

they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown. 5 Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6 And the Lord **repented** [it **repented** the LORD] that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. 7 So the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I **repent** that I have made them. 8 But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. 9 This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God.

Ex 32:9-14 And the Lord said to Moses, I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! 10 Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation. 11 Then Moses pleaded with the Lord his God, and said: Lord, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? 12 Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, `He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and **repent** from this harm to Your people. 13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever. 14 So the Lord **repented** from the harm which He said He would do to His people.

Judges 2:18 And when the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the Lord **repented** because of their groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed them.

1 Sa 15:11,29,35 I **repent** that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments. And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the Lord all night. 29 And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor **repent**. For He is not a man, that He should **repent**. [I think you can see that God tore the kingdom from Saul and would not change in this incident of taking the kingdom from him.] 35 And Samuel went no more to see Saul until the day of his death. Nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul, and the Lord **repented** that He had made Saul king over Israel.

2 Sa 24:16 And when the angel stretched out His hand over Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord **repented** from the destruction, and said to the angel who was destroying the people, It is enough; now restrain your hand.

1 Chr 21:1,15 Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel. 15 And God sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it. As he was destroying, the Lord looked and **repented** of the disaster [What did God do here, if He didn't look and say to Himself, that's enough?, and said to the angel who was destroying, It is enough; now restrain your hand. And the angel of the Lord stood by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

Psa 90:13 Return, O Lord! How long? And [**repent** concerning] Your servants.

Psa 106:45 And for their sake He remembered His covenant and **repented** according to the multitude of His mercies.

Jer 4:28 For this shall the earth mourn and the heavens above be black because I have spoken. I have purposed and will not **repent**, nor will I turn back from it. [Here the word repent is defined by the statement] "I will turn back from it.

Jer 15:6 You have forsaken Me, says the Lord, You have gone backward. Therefore I will stretch out My hand against you and destroy you; I am **weary** of **repenting**! [What does that mean, except that He is showing emotion?]

Jer 18:7-10 The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, 8 if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will **repent** of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. [This, too is a change of God's mind.] 9 And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, 10 if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will **repent** concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it. [This is also a change of God's mind.]

Jer 20:16 And let that man be like the cities Which the Lord overthrew, and did not **repent**; Let him hear the cry in the morning And the shouting at noon,

Jer 26:3,13,19 Perhaps everyone will listen and turn from his evil way, that I may **repent** concerning the calamity which I purpose to bring on them because of the evil of their doings. [Here, God had a change of mind.] 13 Now therefore, amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God; then the Lord will **repent** concerning the doom that He has pronounced against you. 19 Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah ever put him to death? Did he not fear the Lord and seek the Lord's favor? And the Lord **repented** concerning the doom which He had pronounced against them. God changed His mind.. But we are doing great evil against ourselves.

Jer 42:10 If you will still remain in this land, then I will build you and not pull you down, and I will plant you and not pluck you up. For I **repent** concerning the disaster that I have brought upon you.

Eze 24:14 I, the Lord, have spoken it; It shall come to pass, and I will do it; I will not hold back, Nor will I spare, Nor will I **repent** [God will not change His mind.]; According to your ways And according to your deeds They will judge you, Says the Lord God.

Joel 2:13,14 So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the Lord your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He **repents** from doing harm. [This shows God's wonderful nature. He wants to change His mind if man shapes up.] 14 Who knows if He will turn and **repent**, And leave a blessing behind Him – A grain offering and a drink offering For the Lord your God?

Amos 7:3-6 So the Lord **repented** concerning this. It shall not be [Clearly, God changed His mind.], said the Lord. 4 Thus the Lord God showed me: Behold, the Lord God called for conflict by fire, and it consumed the great deep and devoured the territory. 5 Then I said: O Lord God, cease, I pray! Oh, that Jacob may stand, For he is small! 6 So the Lord **repented** concerning this. This also shall not be, said the Lord God. [This was the result of Amos' intercession.]

Jonah 3:9-4:2 Who can tell if God will turn and **repent**, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish? 10 Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God **repented** from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it. [God either lied, or He changed His mind. My God doesn't lie. Neither does yours. [Tit 1:2 He's the non-

lying God according to the Greek.] 4:1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. 2 So he prayed to the Lord, and said, Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who **repents** from doing harm.

Zec 8:14,15 For thus says the Lord of hosts: Just as I determined to punish you when your fathers provoked Me to wrath, says the Lord of hosts, and I would not **repent**, 15 so again in these days I am determined to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah.

God told Hezekiah he was going to die. **2 Kin 20:1-6** In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him, “Thus says the Lord: ‘Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live.’” 2 Then he turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the Lord, saying, 3 “Remember now, O Lord, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done what was good in Your sight.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly. 4 And it happened, before Isaiah had gone out into the middle court, that the word of the Lord came to him, saying, 5 “Return and tell Hezekiah the leader of My people, ‘Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father: “I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the Lord. 6 “And I will add to your days fifteen years. I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake, and for the sake of My servant David.’”” Either God lied or He changed His mind because Hezekiah prayed.

Josh 3:10 And Joshua said, “By this you shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Hivites and the Perizzites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Jebusites. But, we find out later, that He did not drive them out because of their disobedience.

Judges 1:21 But the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who inhabited Jerusalem; so the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day. Jud 3:5 Thus the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

What other reason did God give that He did not drive them out?

Judges 3:4 And they were left, **that He might test** Israel by them, **to know whether they would obey** the commandments of the Lord, which He had commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses.

Let us look a little closer at some of the portions of Scripture which genuinely say God does change His mind. The first one is **Gen 6:5-7**. God shows His passion and mutability. The AV stated it well:

And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it **repented**⁷⁷ the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it **grieved him** at his heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it **repenteth** me that I have made them.

The NIV translated it this way. The emphasized words are the nifal of nacham.

The LORD saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The LORD was **grieved** that he had made man on the earth, and **his heart was filled with pain**. So the LORD said, “I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air—for I am **grieved** that I have made them.”

Either way you translate it, the mildest translation shows God was grieved. He was sorry that He had created man. It caused the impassible God to have intense feeling. It was the cause for the immutable God to change His mind. This didn’t happen just once. It happened repeatedly.

Now, what does it really mean when this word, nacham, **repent**, is used for God’s actions? Calvinists like to call this action an anthropomorphism, attributing the form of man to God, or an anthropopathism, attributing the passion of man to God. But is our God such a poor communicator that He would continually use a figure of speech which showed He **repented**, was grieved, or changed His mind, if the opposite idea was the truth, that He didn’t change His mind? Of course not! Our God is the greatest communicator! This Hebrew word, in any of its translations, undermines the rationalistic philosophical idea of immutability derived from Greek philosophy. As I had to, we must all jettison our preconceived ideas and return to God’s word for an understanding of His nature and works.

Three more passages should lay the Greek’s philosophical ideas of immutability and impassibility to rest. **Num 14:22,23,26,27** shows that God is weary of Israel because she has put God to the test ten times:

“Because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, 23 they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it.” 26 And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 27 “How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who

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The Hebrew word is way nachem, Nifal of nacham. It was translated repent 41 out of 108 times it was used in the AV. The modern translations use the word relent to soften the idea when it refers to God. But, relent has the idea of giving way, yielding. That gives me the idea that God gives up, as in a wrestling match. That sounds too demeaning to me.

complain against Me? I have heard the complaints which the children of Israel make against Me.”

Then, in **Psalm 78:38-41** it says:

But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them. Yes, many a time He turned His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath; 39 For He remembered that they were but flesh, a breath that passes away and does not come again. 40 How often they provoked Him in the wilderness and grieved Him in the desert! 41 Yes, again and again they tempted God and limited the Holy One of Israel.

Remember, later, God expressed His passion. In **Jer 15:6**, God even said, “I am weary of **repenting!**” In these passages we not only see that God changed his mind ten times (mutability), but He was weary (passion) of **repenting**.

God’s **repentance** when He changed His mind after Moses prayed in **Ex 32:9-14** shows us something about God’s foreknowledge. We understand from **Tit 1:2**, “God, who cannot lie”⁷⁸, that God does not lie. Since He does not lie, could He have told Moses that He was going to destroy the nation if He knew He was not. No! On the other hand, if God changed His mind because Moses stood in the gap, He did not lie. God also made many promises that were dependant on the actions of Israel. He even stated in **1 Sam 13:13,14** that He would have established Saul’s kingdom forever:

And Samuel said to Saul, “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you. For now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. 14 But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.”

Saul had disobeyed, and his kingdom was not established at all. Instead, in **1 Sam 16**, Samuel anointed David.

Does this mean that God does not know any of the future? Of course not. God knows the future of the events He determines. In fact, that is what the Scriptures show us. For instance, our eternal security rests on the fact that He said in **Rom 8:29,30**, we who have trusted in Christ are predestined to be conformed to Christ:

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

In **Isa 46:10,11**, God shows us how He can declare what is going to happen in the future. He makes it happen.

Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, “My counsel shall stand, and **I will do** all My pleasure, 11 calling a bird of prey from the east, the man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed I have spoken it; **I will also bring it to pass**. I have purposed it; **I will also do it.**”

He makes a similar statement in **Eph 1:11**: “In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works [the]⁷⁹ all things [τα; παντα] according to the counsel of His will.” The specific all things He is referring to is the body of Christ of verses 10 and 23, “that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things [τα; παντα] in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth – in Him (**Eph 1:10**); “which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all [τα; παντα] in all” (**Eph 1:23**).

This has to do with our eternal security, since “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, [to] be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will” (**Eph 1:4,5**). He chose the body of Christ to be holy and blameless before Him making it sure by His predestination. It doesn’t say He chose us as individuals to be saved. It says He chose us **in Him**. Because we are in Christ, we are chosen. Christ is the elect one. We become members of the body of Christ by believing. Once we believe, we become part of the predestined corporation.

My conclusion is: We are not foreknown as individuals, chosen as individuals, or predestined as individuals. According to **John 1:9**, everyone has been enlightened by Jesus Christ, “That was the true Light which gives

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οὐκ ἀψευδὴς θεός", Robertson, *Word Pictures*, “The non-lying God.”

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In this sentence, I added this definite article [the] in front of all things because the Greek has τα; παντα all things with a definite article. When all things has a definite article it usually is not referring to a universal all things but the all things limited by the context. I realize this is a radical departure from accepted views, but I believe the context substantiates my translation.

light to **every man** coming into the world.” The father has drawn everyone who will listen, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘And **they shall all be taught by God.**’ Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me” (**John 6:44,45**). The Son draws everyone. “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, **will draw all to Myself** [pavnta" eJlkuvsw pro;" ejmavtovn]” (**John 12:32**). The Holy Spirit testifies of Christ. “But when the Helper comes . . . the Spirit of truth . . . He will testify of Me” (**John 15:26**). It is up to each person to respond to the call of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Since God did not predestinate individuals to be saved, we must be sure we take the opportunities to present the gospel of grace to everyone. We should pray for wisdom and boldness to open our mouths to present the mystery just as Paul did in **Eph 6:19**, “Pray . . . for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel.”

Chapter 5

Theodicy

There is a lot of disagreement in the Christian world over the fact that there is evil in the world. How can a righteous God allow evil? They even have a word for the problem that a righteous omnipotent God allows evil to be in the world. That word is theodicy. Theodicy is the defense and vindication of God and His plan for saving some, but not all the people in the world. It comes from 2 Greek words, God, theos, and just, dikaios. I have read many books on this subject, and most fail to answer the problem. Those who hold to the Open View have an answer. It is this! God created beings who are truly free, who do what they want to do, and who can revolt against His will. I believe Greg Boyd has written two of the best books on this subject. They are *God at War* and *Satan and the Problem of Evil*.

Because Satan’s rebellion happened, we are in a universe at war. The devil and his angels rebelled against God and became extremely evil. The Bible says in **1 Pe 5:8-10** that our adversary is the devil.

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 9 Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. 10 But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.

In contrast to Satan, Christ came and died for the sins of the world so, as it says in **1 Jo 3:8**, He could destroy the works of the devil. “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.” That is reiterated in **Acts 10:38** “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.”

When we realize how extremely evil these spiritual beings are, we should be more motivated to get into the battle at the spiritual level. Then we will be aware that the wickedness in this world is inspired by extremely evil beings who take great pleasure in causing hideous acts of cruelty. We’ve had the repulsive killings of Columbine and the World Trade Center. These terrorist acts of murdering thousands of innocent people are beyond my understanding. I think it is a must to read the eyewitness account of what happened to a young Jewish girl living in the Warsaw ghetto during the Nazi occupation in Greg Boyd’s *God at War*. I shrank in horror when I read it. It still makes my heart heave when I think about it. Radical evil of this sort cannot be captured in abstract definitions. The evil we are up against transcends words, for evil cannot be grasped in a detached neutral abstract way. For us, evil is the concrete pictures of millions of atrocities spawned by a gloating devil who loves suffering.

Now, my question is: Could a righteous holy God be the cause of such hideous merciless acts? To my astonishment, many Christians say, yes. But, if God causes everything that happens and is all-loving and perfectly good, He must want to protect the innocent ones who have not had the chance to trust in His Son for their salvation. If God exercises absolute control over the world as Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, and those who hold fast to the Westminster Confession believe, then, He must have been in total control of the airplanes, and decided not to protect those who died in the World Trade Center. Yet, they suffered unspeakable ordeals and died murder victims. This is the problem of theodicy.

The God of the Bible is not omni causal. God’s beings have a certain amount of freedom to war against Him and His desires. For example, spiritual beings oppose Him. **Dan 10:1-6,11-21** shows this:

In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia . 2 . I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. 3 I ate no pleasant

food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled. 4 Now on the twenty-fourth day of the first month, . 5 I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a certain man (possibly Gabriel, who visited him in 8:16, and 9:21) clothed in linen, whose waist was girded with gold of Uphaz! 6 His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like torches of fire, his arms and feet like burnished bronze in color, and the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude. 11 And he said to me, “O Daniel, man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you.” While he was speaking this word to me, I stood trembling. 12 Then he said to me, “Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words. 13 But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia. 20 Then he said, “Do you know why I have come to you? And now I must return to fight with the prince of Persia; and when I have gone forth, indeed the prince of Greece will come. 21 But I will tell you what is noted in the Scripture of Truth. No one upholds me against these, except Michael your prince.”

It says human beings oppose Him, are blind in their understanding, and have corrupt minds in **Eph 2:2**: “You once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.” Their minds are darkened according to **Eph 4:18** having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart. They have corrupt minds as well according to **2 Ti 3:2-4,8**:

For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, 4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 8 Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith.

Since we are at war, how do we prepare for battle? **Psa 91:4** tells us that “His truth shall be your shield and buckler.” We must be armed for this battle against the wicked spiritual hosts according to **Eph 6:11-19**:

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the scheming of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. 14 Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; 18 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints— 19 and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”

Most determinists miss the point of God’s theodicy. I happen to believe that God is just more powerful than Calvinists represent Him to be when they attempt to answer Open Theism statements. R.C. Sproul believes that things might get out of God’s control if one molecule is free to move wherever it is blown. I believe God is so powerful that nothing can cause Him so much trouble that He cannot handle it. In scriptural situations that show evil, did God make those people be as evil as they were? Did He then destroy them because they were so evil? I believe the Bible shows these nations became evil on their own. God didn’t make them evil. God took action against them because they were so evil, but He calls them to repentance before He destroys them.

One of the best passages in support of God’s theodicy is the assertion in Ecclesiastes that man’s evil is his own doing and not God’s: **Ecc 7:29** “Truly, this only I have found: That God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.” Now, I think the question is: Could a righteous holy God be the cause of such hideous merciless acts as we have experienced in the world? To my bewilderment, many Christians say, yes. But, if God is all-loving and perfectly good, which I believe He is, and if God exercises absolute control over the world as Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, and the whole Reformed tradition hold, then, He must be in complete control of all the horrible tragedies in the world.

Those in the Twin Towers were innocent in the sense that they were not at war with anyone. However, a

terrorist nation killed innocent people, although they were civilians. Yet, my brothers in Christ who are Classic Calvinists maintain that God caused the death of these people who were in those Twin Towers. Nevertheless, that is impossible for it says it James 1:12-17:

Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. 13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. (to do evil) 14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

I want to look at a passage in 1 Kings 22. We should read the whole account of the lying spirit, Ahab, and the 400 false prophets in **1 Ki 22:5-28**:

Also Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel [Ahab, verse 20], "Please inquire for the word of the Lord today." 6 Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said to them, "Shall I go against Ramoth Gilead to fight, or shall I refrain?" So they said, "Go up, for the Lord will deliver it into the hand of the king." 7 And Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not still a prophet of the Lord here, that we may inquire of Him?" 8 So the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "There is still one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord; but I hate him, because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." And Jehoshaphat said, "Let not the king say such things!" 9 Then the king of Israel called an officer and said, "Bring Micaiah the son of Imlah quickly!" 10 The king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, having put on their robes, sat each on his throne, at a threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets prophesied before them. 11 Now Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah had made horns of iron for himself; and he said, "Thus says the Lord: 'With these you shall gore the Syrians until they are destroyed.'" 12 And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, "Go up to Ramoth Gilead and prosper, for the Lord will deliver it into the king's hand." 13 Then the messenger who had gone to call Micaiah spoke to him, saying, "Now listen, the words of the prophets with one accord encourage the king. Please, let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak encouragement." 14 And Micaiah said, "As the Lord lives, whatever the Lord says to me, that I will speak." 15 Then he came to the king; and the king said to him, "Micaiah, shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall we refrain?" And he answered him, "Go and prosper, for the Lord will deliver it into the hand of the king!" 16 So the king said to him, "How many times shall I make you swear that you tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?" 17 Then he said, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the Lord said, 'These have no master. Let each return to his house in peace.'" 18 And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "Did I not tell you he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?" 19 Then Micaiah said, "Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by, on His right hand and on His left. 20 And the Lord said, 'Who will persuade Ahab to go up, that he may fall at Ramoth Gilead?' So one spoke in this manner, and another spoke in that manner. 21 Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, and said, 'I will persuade him.' 22 The Lord said to him, 'In what way?' So he said, 'I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And the Lord said, 'You shall persuade him, and also prevail. Go out and do so.' 23 Therefore look! The Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets of yours, and the Lord has declared disaster against you." 24 Now Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah went near and struck Micaiah on the cheek, and said, "Which way did the spirit from the Lord go from me to speak to you?" 25 And Micaiah said, "Indeed, you shall see on that day when you go into an inner chamber to hide!" 26 So the king of Israel said, "Take Micaiah, and return him to Amon the governor of the city and to Joash the king's son; 27 and say, 'Thus says the king: "Put this fellow in prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and water of affliction, until I come in peace.'" 28 But Micaiah said, "If you ever return in peace, the Lord has not spoken by me." And he said, "Take heed, all you people!"

Did the Lord send the lying spirit? Yes. Did the Lord send Micaiah to speak the truth? Yes. Did the Lord know that Ahab would believe his 400 false prophets? I think He did. Did the Lord know that Jehoshaphat would ask for a prophet of the Lord? Yes. Did the Lord show that the false prophets were speaking from a lying spirit? Yes. Did Micaiah tell Ahab the truth? Yes. Did Ahab follow the word of the Lord delivered by Micaiah? No.

Did Ahab go into battle and die as God wanted him to because he was so evil? Yes. Did God punish Ahab for all of his wickedness? Yes. Does God do evil? No.

I think the episode described in 1 Kings 22 is a marvelous example of how God works through evil beings (humans and spirits) while maintaining His own integrity. God's purpose here was not lying or any other evil. His purpose was to bring to judgment the wicked king Ahab. Now, God could have accomplished that easily by Himself. One quick lightning bolt would have fried Ahab – no muss, no fuss. Yet, God, for reasons I think He never fully explained, decided to work within His creation, using the freewill actions of created beings in order to achieve His desired result. God essentially puts out a contract on Ahab. The deceitful spirit volunteers for the mission. The lying spirit is a lying spirit; God does not induce him to lie. Nor does God violate Ahab's freedom in any way; Ahab is a wicked king who deserves the judgment he gets. Perhaps the best part of all this is how God works out the actual killing of Ahab. Ahab takes the unusual step of disguising himself when he goes out to battle. Ironically, this attempt to elude the judgment pronounced by Micaiah is in itself an acknowledgement of its veracity. The king of Syria, presumably under God's influence, orders his forces to focus only on killing Ahab. The disguised king eludes the amassed forces arrayed against him, only to be felled when "a man drew a bow at random" and shot an arrow which found its way into the tiny space between the pieces of Ahab's armor. The prophecy uttered against him by Elijah (21:19) came true by an apparent fluke.

Normally, Elijah's prophecy that dogs would lick Ahab's blood would indicate that his body would be left exposed – a hideous shame in a culture where being left unburied was the worst form of dishonor. Yet, we read in 22:37 that Ahab – even here, referred to as 'the king' – received a proper burial. (Note here yet an additional twist. They called out, "every man to his city," so Ahab returned to Samaria, his city – to be buried there. This text is one irony after another!) But Ahab had bled from his wounds all over his chariot, and, when they took the chariot out to be washed, the water, with Ahab's blood mixed into it, was licked up by dogs, fulfilling, in an unusually literal manner, Elijah's word, which itself was another irony – Ahab would justly suffer the fate he unjustly imposed on Naboth. This interesting passage shows us "it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble" His people.

R.C. Sproul's Calvinistic approach ruins everything that's so delightfully ironic in this story. In that model, God has eternally predestined all actions. The entirety of history is like an instant replay, like rolling back the tape. In that model, nothing particularly special is going on here. In the Open View, in contrast, we see God as the Master Artisan, gracefully intervening at just the right moments to steer the course of events to His desired end. In a vast sea of spiritual, human, and simply natural forces, each to a degree independent and yet all ultimately interdependent, God deftly manipulates an occasional detail here and there in order to accomplish through this maze of forces what He could more easily have done Himself. Where God, as understood by R.C. Sproul, is strong enough to predestine all things, God in the Open View is powerful enough to orchestrate His desired conclusion while interacting with countless other beings and circumstances which He has not predestined. Our God is more than powerful: He is a poet who has given us the privilege of penning a line or two in His epic; He is an artist who has honored us by placing in our hands little brushes of our own.

For the Calvinist who says "God is not the author of evil, but He has decreed evil things to happen by use of second causes", what on earth in their theology could a second cause be? They believe that God has predestined every single thing that ever has happened, is happening or will happen. What difference does it make whether God utilizes a lying spirit as an intermediary in the process of bringing about the lying words of Ahab's flattering prophets? In their theology, God in eternity past predestined those prophets to lie just as He predestined the lying spirit to inspire them to do so. The very fact that they are reading the biblical text in terms of finding secondary causes belies their belief that God predestined all things. They recognize, whether they realize it or not, that the biblical text is written in real time, not some sort of eternal now. It presents God as interacting with other beings whose actions do not stem automatically from His predestination. God in Calvinism does not manipulate events as we see so beautifully portrayed in 1 Kings 22; according to them, His only power is to cause them from start to finish.

I reject the theological makeup of God that Calvinists present, in large part because, as much as they deny it, their theology makes God out to be the author of sin. In their writings they repeatedly demonstrate an inability to differentiate between God and their concept of God, between God's word and their interpretation of God's word. R.C. Sproul and his allies use "sola scriptura", but the reality is that they see it as sola interpretatio scripturae mea – only Scripture as they interpret it.