

Salvation & Sovereignty

Introduction

TULIP compared to ROSES

- T - Total Depravity ————— R - Radical Depravity
- U - Unconditional Election ————— O - Overcoming Grace
- L - Limited Atonement ————— S - Sovereign Election
- I - Irresistible Grace ————— E - Eternal Life
- P - Perseverance of the Saints ————— S - Singular Redemption

What Will Keathley Argue?

1. T, U & P must be altered to bring them in line with Scripture's teaching on salvation, and L & I must be rejected.¹
2. ROSES provides a better model of soteriology (i.e. study of the doctrine of salvation).
3. Molinism provides the best theoretical accompaniment to the ROSES soteriology.

Defining Views & Such

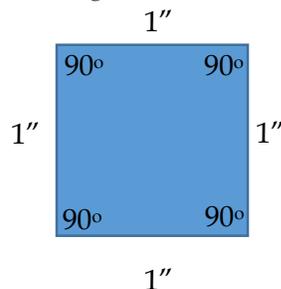
- a. RADICAL DEPRAVITY - "The old term, *total depravity*, gives the impression that fallen humanity always is as bad as it possibly can be [cf. Romans 14]...*radical depravity*, more correctly emphasizes that every aspect of our being is affected by the fall and renders us incapable of saving ourselves or even of wanting to be saved" (3).
- b. OVERCOMING GRACE - "...*irresistible grace*, seems to imply that God saves a person against [their] will...*overcoming grace*, highlights that it is God's persistent beckoning that overcomes our wicked obstinacy" (3).
 - a. Note - the implication Keathley notes isn't sufficient to motivate one to jettison I from a good understanding of salvation without hearing the response a TULIPer might offer (e.g. perhaps God saves someone **through** their will, and not in spite of it).
- c. SOVEREIGN ELECTION - "Often the term *unconditional election* is presented in such a way as to give the impression that those who die without receiving Christ did so because God never desired their salvation in the first place...*sovereign election*, affirms that God desires the salvation of all, yet accentuates that our salvation is not based on us choosing God but on God choosing us" (3).
 - a. Note - this last claim about accentuating God's choosing will need to be carefully scrutinized when we come to this discussion.
- d. ETERNAL LIFE - "*perseverance of the saints*, leads to the notion that a believer's assurance is based on his ability to persevere rather than on the fact he is declared righteous in Christ...*eternal life*, is to stress that believers enjoy a transformed life that is preserved and we are given a faith which will remain" (3).
- e. SINGULAR REDEMPTION - "*limited atonement*, teaches that Christ died only for the elect and gives the impression that there is something lacking in the atonement...*singular redemption* [emphasizes] that Christ died sufficiently for every person, although efficiently only for those who believe.

¹ Keathley claims that "the framers of the Canons of Dort would not like the TULIP formulation" (2). Why? Well first, they do not tell us enough by themselves about much about Reformed soteriology, and second, they are misleading in different ways.

What is Molinism?

Molinism is a model (i.e. description of how the world could be) of divine providence that affirms the following two theses: i) God possesses sovereign control over all of creation, and ii) human beings possess morally significant Libertarian free will. This is contrasted with Calvinism, which affirms (i) but not (ii); that is, Calvinism affirms God's sovereignty while denying that humans possess morally significant Libertarian free will (although Calvinists affirm a type of free will (*compatibilism*) that is possessed by humans). Alternatively, Arminians (i.e. Open Theists) enthusiastically accept (ii) but deny (i) because they think that (i) & (ii) are incompatible. Moreover, they think that because God's complete sovereignty would eliminate morally significant Libertarian free will, and free will is really important to God, God would deny God-self access to the knowledge of the future free actions of creatures. We'll assume Open Theism is not a live option simply for the sake of focusing on the other two options in this book.

But then, what do we mean by calling Molinism a model? Well think about it. Suppose someone told you that it was *impossible* for one object, *x*, to satisfy the following two criteria: i) *x* has 4 sides of equal length & ii) *x*'s angles add up to 360 degrees. This person is obviously wrong, but how would you go about *showing* them why they're mistaken? Well, you come up with a *model* that satisfies both (i) and (ii); that is, you draw a picture of a shape that is 360 degrees with 4 sides of equal length. Here's one such model:



This is a model. It can be a picture. It could also be a story that tries to explain how some puzzling event in the world could possibly have happened. An example of a story would be something like the Kitty Genovese case about a woman who was brutally murdered in Central Park while 30 or so onlookers did nothing to help her. How is it psychologically possible for all 30 individuals to simply be a bystander in such a case? Well, psychologists would present a model by offering a rationale like: *well, everyone must have thought, "someone else has already called the police, so if I call, it won't help. And I don't want to have to give some sort of witness report, so I'll just let the other person take care of it."* This explanation is a model that, if plausible, will show how it is psychologically possible for something like the Kitty Genovese case to occur. Thus, models help us see two things: A) we can see whether two or more theses are consistent (as with the square case above), & B) we can grow in our understanding of some phenomenon (as in the Kitty Genovese case). So, Molinism is a model to show that the two theses are consistent – (i) we have morally significant Libertarian free will & (ii) God is sovereign over creation – and to help us grow in our understanding of God's relationship to creation.

Discussion Questions

1. Are we just trying to understand something that is beyond our comprehension by trying to come up with a model of divine providence? What should the role of mystery be for the Christian?
2. Compare TULIP & ROSES. Are there any points between the two that give you pause? Why, and are there Biblical passages you can think of that seem to support our hesitancy?

The Biblical Case for Molinism

Salvation & Sovereignty (Chapter 1) by Kenneth Keathley

In this chapter, Keathley introduces the main tenets of Molinism and gathers together the Biblical support for each of those tenets. In order to accomplish this, we must first bring to mind the concepts employed by Molinism which are in need of Biblical support: i) God has exhaustive knowledge (i.e. *omniscience*), including knowledge of the future and what *could or would* have happened in other circumstances, ii) God has *control* over everything, iii) God is free from all things (i.e. God's aseity, perfect *freedom* & the world's *contingency*), & iv) God sets legitimate choices before humans. The Scriptural references are included on a separate handout, so I will only mention a few in this summary; however, rather than focus on the Scriptural support, I will now lay out what exactly Molinism is supposed to be.

QUESTION: THIS CHAPTER DEALS WITH GOD'S ASEITY, OMNISCIENCE, OMNIPOTENCE, AND MANY OTHER ATTRIBUTES.

- I) WHAT ATTRIBUTES OF GOD DO YOU THINK ARE MOST CENTRAL TO WHO HE IS, OR
- II) WHICH ATTRIBUTES HELP YOU BEST TO RELATE TO GOD? WHY?

Recall from the introduction that Molinism is a model which purports to reconcile the claim that humans possess Libertarian freedom with the claim that God is in complete control of creation. Here is the model:

Much as we humans deliberate in steps, considering first what our goals are (e.g. *going to France*), considering what constraints there are on our achieving a goal (e.g. *teleportation won't do it*), and then selecting a decent means to the selected goal (e.g. *take a plane*), we can think of God's creative activity as deliberative. Thus, God can be thought to go through deliberative steps much as we do in our everyday deliberative activities. There are disanalogies that should be noted, of course, since God does not actually progress through such deliberation (as if God were ignorant of constraints on decisions at one time), but so long as none of the disanalogies are central to our understanding God's creative activity, they won't be a problem for the coherence of the Molinist's model. Here, then, is how we should understand God's creative & providential activity.

The content of God's knowledge comes in three logically ordered moments. The first of these moments consists of God's natural knowledge, which includes his knowledge of all necessary truths and possible states of affairs. This knowledge is called *pre-volitional* because it consists of propositions (or claims) which are true in all possible worlds independent of God's own creative activity. For example, '2+2=4' is a necessary truth, and God's being identical to God-self is a necessary truth (i.e. there is no possible world in which God is not identical to God at that world). The third moment of God's knowledge consists of the truths about the created world, and thus, this knowledge is dubbed *post-volitional knowledge* (i.e. its truth depends on which world God chooses to create). For example, it will include such truths as 'Adam & Eve ate the apple' and 'around 1517 AD, the Protestant Reformation will begin'. But as you'll have noticed, we left out the second moment of God's knowledge, and that is due to its being placed *between* God's *natural* and *free* knowledge. This placement gives it the name *middle knowledge*, and it is unique in the following two ways: i) it is different from God's natural knowledge in that the contents of *middle knowledge* are contingent truths & ii) it is different from free knowledge in that it is *pre-volitional*. Moreover, the content of *middle knowledge* largely consists in *conditional* statements of the *if-then* form with 'would' in the consequent. For instance, 'if Adam were in world₁, then Adam would freely choose to eat the apple' and 'if Adam were in world₂, then Adam would freely refrain from eating the apple'. The crucial point to note about these *conditionals of creaturely freedom* in God's

middle knowledge is that which of them are true depends on what the free decisions of creatures would be, decisions which because they are free are contingent. So, when God takes the *possible worlds* he knows through natural knowledge, he then considers which of the possible worlds is *feasible* for creation, given which conditionals of creaturely freedom happen to be contingently true. From this set of *feasible worlds*, God then sovereignly selects which world he wants to create (i.e. actualize) and creates it. Thus, Libertarian freedom is maintained by the *pre-volitional middle knowledge* that God uses to determine which world is actual, and God's sovereignty is maintained since God still chooses from a large (and presumably infinitely large) set of *possible & feasible worlds*.

QUESTION: DOES THE MODEL MAKE SENSE? WHAT PARTS OF THE MODEL ARE WEIRD OR SEEM TROUBLING THEOLOGICALLY? MORALLY?

So, there's the Molinist model. Many objections can be lodged against it, though generally it seems that they fall into two categories: i) either someone calls into question the coherence of *middle knowledge*, or ii) they argue that the sovereignty we get in the model is too weak to accommodate theological and/or Biblical evidence. To argue for Molinism, Keathley simply offers a load of Biblical evidence in support of the model's key notions: *contingency, conditionality, sovereignty & omniscience*.

QUESTION: HOW SHOULD WE THINK OF AUTHORITY REGARDING OUR BELIEFS? IS SCRIPTURE THE ONLY OR MOST AUTHORITATIVE SOURCE OF BELIEFS? GIVEN THAT REASON IS NECESSARY FOR INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE, WHAT PLACE DOES IT HAVE IN A HIERARCHY OF THESE SORTS OF AUTHORITIES? WHAT ABOUT CHRISTIAN TRADITION AND HISTORY? DOES SOMETHING BEING A TRADITIONAL VIEW MAKE IT MORE LIKELY TO BE TRUE, OR MORE REASONABLE TO BELIEVE?

As I said earlier, I won't list all of the verses in support of these tenets since they're included on the other handout. Here's a brief taste of them.

God has Exhaustive Knowledge of All Things - "Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure" (Ps. 147:5); "Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed" (1 Sam. 2:3).

God has Meticulous Control over All Things - "For nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke 1:37); "The LORD of Hosts has sworn: As I have planned so it will be; as I have purposed it, so it will happen" (Isa. 14:24).

Contingency - "And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household.' And he did not do many might works there, because of their unbelief" (Matt. 13:57-8); "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13; this explains our choice & moral responsibility as well).

Conditionality - i) God sets choices before us - "And Elijah came near to all the people and said, 'How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him'" (1 Kgs. 18:21); ii) Counterfactuals - "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day" (Matt. 11:21-3).

Does God Desire the Salvation of All?

Salvation & Sovereignty (Chapter 2) by Kenneth Keathley

In this chapter, Keathley argues that in light of Christ's commission to present the Gospel to *all* people, we should adopt an understanding of God's will called the *antecedent/consequent will* distinction. In what follows I will briefly introduced the four different understandings of God's will that he considers—*God's Singular Will Expressed by Love, God's Singular Will Expressed by Salvation of the Elect, God's Hidden/Revealed Will, God's Antecedent/Consequent Will*—along with some reflections on different theological conclusions these positions might lead someone to accept.

Many theologians prefer to think of God's will as entirely undivided, often motivated by concerns of divine simplicity. Keathley divides this group of theologians into two broad groups: those who think of God's will as primarily motivated by God's love and those who think of God's will as primarily motivated by God's desire to glorify Himself. We'll consider each in turn. According to the first group of theologians, if we think of God's love as central, then we are compelled to accept universalism. Indeed, Reformed theologians of this persuasion tend to view the idea that God would predestine some to eternal perdition as wicked if it is indeed true that God could have predestined them to eternal life. Thomas Talbott, who is a member of this camp, and John Piper, who is *not*, have a published debate that nicely illustrates the wide disparity that exists between this way of thinking about God and a more traditionally Reformed view:

Talbott: If there be a single loved one of mine whom God *could* [emphasis original] redeem but doesn't—if it should turn out, for instance, that God fails to love my own little daughter—then I can think of no better response than a paraphrase of John Stuart Mill: 'I will not worship such a God, and if such a God can send me to hell for not so worshiping him, then to hell I will go.' Of course, this may mean simply that I am not one of the elect, or, if I am one of the elect, that God will someday transform my heart so that I can be just as calloused towards my loved ones as he is.¹

Piper: But I am not ignorant that God *may* [emphasis original] not have chosen my sons for his sons. And, though I think I would give my life for their salvation, if they should be lost to me, I would not rail against the Almighty. He is God. I am but a man. The Potter has absolute rights over the clay. Mine is to bow before his unimpeachable character and believe that the Judge of all the earth has ever and always will do right.²

QUESTION: WHAT ARE SOME ADMIRABLE AND SOME LESS THAN ADMIRABLE QUALITIES, AT FIRST GLANCE, OF EACH OF THESE VIEWS REGARDING THE POSSIBLE DAMNATION OF ONE'S FAMILY?

According to the second position, adhered to by *decretal theologians*, God should be understood as decreeing from eternity past who would be elect. There are two further versions of *decretal theology*. According to the *supralapsarian* (i.e. Latin for *before the Fall*), God decrees who is elect *prior* to decreeing that there would be a Fall, Atonement, etc. Thus, the explanation for the eternal destiny of everyone falls on God's decision to either elect or not elect anyone before they've even had the opportunity to commit a sin. According to the *infralapsarian* (i.e. Latin for *after the Fall*), God decrees who the elect will be *after* decreeing the Fall, Atonement, etc. Thus, the explanation for reprobation ends in the human decision to sin and the explanation for election ends with God's decision. Both of these positions, however, deny that human freedom limits God's creative activity in any way.

Some difficult supposed implications of such a view are as follows: i) it seems to deny universal love, or at the very least, that the same love is offered for both elect and reprobate; ii) since the Gospel is intended for those who believe, it should only be preached to those who've shown evidence of regeneration; & iii) it is unclear whether the reprobate have a duty, according to this paradigm, to repent and try to accept the Gospel.

QUESTION: WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THESE OBJECTIONS? ARE ANY OF THEM PLAUSIBLE?

According to the Hidden/Revealed Will paradigm, God has two wills. First, God genuinely wills that all be saved, but this is a conditional (and revealed) will because what God actually is willing is that all who believe be saved. However, in addition God has a hidden will by which He determines who will receive the gift of faith for belief, and by this view, all and only those who receive this gift are elect. Alternatively, one might follow John Piper in presenting it as follows: *God*

¹ Talbott, Thomas. "On Predestination, Reprobation, and the Love of God: A Polemic." *Reformed Journal* 33.2 (1983): 14-15.

² Piper, John. "How Does a Sovereign God Love? A reply to Thomas Talbott." *Reformed Journal* 33.4 (1983): 9-13.

*genuinely desires that all be saved, but God desires even more that His glory be expressed to the greatest extent...and God's glory cannot be expressed fully without there being some damned individuals because that would preclude a demonstration of God's justice.*³

Keathley presents 6 objections to this view (some better than others) – (1) Many theologians end up negating God's revealed will when they invoke the hidden will of God; (2) Christ seems to only manifest *part* of God and not all of God since the *hidden will* in which the mystery of who receives salvation resides is not manifested by the Incarnation; (3) We are told to ignore the 'dreadful' will of God and focus instead on Christ, which is like being told, "pay no attention to the man behind the curtain. He's not your concern..." (4) Preaching the *revealed will* seems hypocritical on this view; (5) **God** appears *hypocritical* on this view since his revealed will presents salvation to all, despite the fact that according to God's hidden (and full) will, He in no way intends all to receive salvation; & (6) "God commands all to repent and takes no delight in the death of the sinner, but not all are saved because God does not intend to give His redeeming grace to all" seems intuitively incoherent (Keathley 57).

QUESTION: IS THERE A BETTER WAY TO CONCEIVE OF THIS VIEW? SHOULD A PASTOR WHO BELIEVES THEY ARE HYPOCRITICAL TO PREACH THE REVEALED WILL OF GOD WITHOUT THE HIDDEN WILL PREACH THE HIDDEN WILL? OR ARE THEY MORALLY COMPELLED TO REMAIN HYPOCRITICAL?

According to the final view, *the antecedent & consequent will distinction*, God's will can be thought of as conceptually divisible into his antecedent will, composed of a complete *all-things-being-equal* preference ranking, and his consequent will, that is, God's desired eternal action *all-things-considered*, including constraints on that action. To understand the difference, notice that a just judge is someone who will *all-things-being-equal* desire that he send no one to prison, but who, when presented with a criminal for whom justice demands they spend some time in prison, will *all-things-considered* choose the sentence of prison because it is *all-things-considered* most valuable.

Applying this to God, then, God's *all-things-being-equal* desire is that all people be saved, which is God's *antecedent will*. This will expresses all of God's *all-things-being-equal* desires. However, God's *all-things-considered* desire will factor in the desire for a relationship with persons who form their own character and are autonomous agents, and these are other *all-things-being-equal* desires of God that may be higher in order of preference. Once God factors in *all* of his *all-things-being-equal* desires and finds an action consistent with the most valuable way of satisfying them (or as many of them as possible, or the most important of them as possible), then God forms His *all-things-considered* desire, called His *consequent will*.

There are four characteristics, then, of the *Antecedent Will*. It is...(A) *universal*, (B) *unconditional*, (C) *sincere* & (D) *ordinate* (i.e. *ordered...you can think of this as a ranking of God's antecedent preferences from most to least important*). And there are three characteristics of the *Consequent Will*. It is...(A) *consistent with the properties of his creatures* (e.g. *freedom of will*), (B) *conditional* since God wills that salvation is conditioned on our choice...although God can know what our response will actually be (through middle knowledge, for instance) & (C) *just*.

QUESTION: SHOULD WE WILL SOMETHING JUST BECAUSE GOD WILLS IT? SUPPOSE THE ANTECEDENT/CONSEQUENT WILL ACCOUNT IS TRUE. THEN SHOULD WE WILL IN ACCORDANCE WITH GOD'S ANTECEDENT WILL, CONSEQUENT WILL, OR BOTH? COULD WILLING IN ACCORDANCE WITH BOTH PRESENT US WITH THE DILEMMA OF WILLING INCOMPATIBLE THINGS?

Altogether there are roughly three common types of objections to the antecedent/consequent will distinction. First, it seems to make God's decision contingent on human decision. Second, it smacks of *merit* theology. And third, as Piper argues, human freedom seems to be depicted as more important than God's glory on this view.

QUESTION: CONSIDER THESE OBJECTIONS. ARE ANY OF THEM GOOD? DO YOU HAVE A BETTER OBJECTION?

As stated earlier, Keathley thinks this last option, which has been the most common view in Christian history despite the typical Reformed rejection of it, should be adopted by those who believe that...i) the Gospel is truly intended for all & ii) not all accept the gift of salvation. Thus, he will assume this view in the future chapters.

³ *Jonathan's Objection to Piper* – Notice that this view seems to compromise God's *aseity*, that is, God's non-dependence on creation. If God essentially is such that he must manifest his glory as fully as possible and there must exist some other beings to whom God's just wrath can be directed, then God *is compelled to create* something to fully manifest His glory. But *aseity* tells us that God is self-sufficient and fully glorious, even in the possible world in which He creates nothing. Therefore, if Piper's correct, God's not *a se*.

R is for Radical Depravity

Salvation & Sovereignty (Chapter 3) by Kenneth Keathley

In this chapter, Keathley evaluates two competing understandings of human free will, soft determinism & soft libertarianism, in terms of their fit with the *Four Stages of Human Experience*, following the Formula of Concord (1577): *The Creation of Adam, The Fall, The Present Condition of Believers & the Glorified Saints*. In addition, Keathley uses two passages as foundations for the Biblical understanding of freedom as an **ability** (1 Cor. 10:13 - "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide a way of escape that you may be able to endure it") and **manifestation of one's character** (Matt. 7:17-18 - "So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, no can a diseased tree bear good fruit"). In what follows, I'll outline the two accounts of free will briefly, followed with a discussion of how each handles the *Four Stages of Human Experience*. In the end, if Keathley is correct, then the **soft libertarian** view of freedom will best explain the stages of human experience, and consequently, emerge as clearly preferable to the **soft deterministic** paradigm.

According to soft determinism, all choices & events are *caused* by prior conditions, but in spite of this, the choices of human individuals are still free. And this is because freedom to choose, for the soft determinist, should simply be understood as freedom to choose *as* one desires. However, even if we are free to choose *as* we desire, the soft determinist denies that we are free to choose *what* we desire. Moreover, the soft determinist denies that it is true in any meaningful sense that *we possibly could have chosen otherwise than we in fact did choose* on any given occasion. Thus, the ability to choose otherwise than one in fact chooses is illusion or *hypothetical ability*, rather than an *actual ability*.

According to soft libertarianism, choices, while governed in *part* by our characters which limit the set of possible options from which we are to choose, are not completely determined by prior conditions and our character. Thus, *at least some significant character-forming choices* have no completely determining forces, which leaves room for the agent herself to select which action she prefers. This selection of an action has consequences for the agent, however, because her choices in significant circumstances change her character in various ways. For instance, suppose Bruce lacks courage when passing a mugging in the street, but not so much that choosing to courageously intervene is entirely beyond him. In this case, Bruce has the ability to directly will himself to intervene, and if he does, his character changes such that he becomes more courageous, and consequently, more likely to act courageously when encountering similar situations in the future. Soft libertarianism, then, affirms **five tenets**: i) humans are ultimately responsible for their choices and characters because ii) they are originating causes for at least some significant self-forming choices. This means iii) that at crucial times, we have an ability to choose to do or refrain from doing significant actions, which iv) allow us to shape our own character. Thus, we have two sorts of freedom – (1) *freedom of integrity*, by which we can choose to shape ourselves incrementally into the persons we wish to become & (2) *freedom of responsibility*, by which we are rightly held responsible for who we are and the actions we perform. And notice, then, that if we choose to form our characters in a particular direction long enough, it is possible for us to lose our freedom of integrity (e.g. heroin addicts or compulsive gamblers).

QUESTION: ANY CLARIFICATIONS ON THE DETAILS OR REGARDING *WHY* WE'RE TALKING ABOUT THIS? ARE THERE REASONS FOR WHY WE SHOULD CARE ABOUT HAVING EITHER SORT OF FREEDOM?

Let us now turn to the *Four Stages*, beginning with freedom as it is depicted prior to the Fall. R. C. Sproul Sr., a self-confessed soft determinist, breaks with his deterministic roots to explain Adam's freedom as if it were libertarian: "Before the fall Adam was endowed with two possibilities: He had the ability to sin and the ability not to sin." The reason Sproul Sr. breaks with his determinism during the stage of creation is that he cannot see how to avoid the conclusion that God is ultimately responsible for sin coming into the world unless Adam and Eve had libertarian freedom. Sr.'s son, R. C. Sproul Jr., on the other hand, thinks that such a maneuver simply expresses a cowardly commitment to soft determinism. Thus, Sproul Jr. argues that God, as the one who endows (i.e. determines) all of creation (including Satan) with original desires and direction is clearly the creator of sin.¹

Keathley rejects Sproul Jr.'s views for 6 reasons: (i) Sproul Jr.'s position is driven by upholding causal determinism rather than by a faithful exegesis of Scripture, (ii) calling God the author of sin is nearly blasphemy, (iii) claiming that God *had to create* because of the truth of causal determinism robs God of His perfect freedom & (iv) aseity, while (v) also rendering God dependent on the existence of wicked people to whom He can demonstrate His wrath. (vi) And this makes the problem of evil nearly, if not entirely, intractable. Here is Keathley's reflection on the logic of Sproul Jr.'s book:

"...since God is not the cause of sin, then causal determinism cannot be true. If a starting assumption [i.e. causal determinism] logically compels one to a conclusion outside the boundaries set by Scripture, then the starting assumption must be wrong. The vast majority of Calvinists who hold to soft determinism reject the notion that

¹ Sproul Jr., R. C. *Almighty Over All*, 54.

sin originated with God, but they do so by a sheer act of will. The logic of their system leads to such a conclusion, but most have the good sense not to accept it" (85).

The soft *libertarian*, on the other hand, seems to honor the text of Genesis 1-3 by claiming that Adam & Eve possessed true freedom grounded in the *imago dei* (1:26), and this freedom included many options (2:16 - "You are free to eat from any tree...") and real participation from our First Parents (2:19 where Adam *names* the animals).

When we turn to humanity's *fallen stage*, we see that they are in bondage to sin, but that, while this is the case, they can nevertheless perform some **relatively good actions** (cf. Acts. 10:22). Nevertheless, because of the Fall even good actions lack a unified endorsement of the good within any human's will; that is, they are conflicted, even if only slightly. And so, **all action**, even relatively good actions, **are tainted by the Fall**. And thus, **short of God's grace, no will is perfectly unified around the good**. All of these truths, as it turns out, mesh very well with the soft libertarian paradigm, since it admits that we have conflicting desires partially determining choice, which allows us to see how there can be relative good in unregenerate people, while maintaining an overarching commitment to the bad effects of the Fall.

When considering the state of believers, soft determinism runs into another puzzle; namely, if we are regenerate and God's decision to give us grace on all occasions is what *determines* whether we continue in sin, then why are not all Christians *perfect*? John Piper recognizes this puzzle in his 2006 interview with J. Taylor when he states:

My sin is my greatest burden. Why? Why? Why is the process of sanctification so slow? And the first answer is because I am so evil. But the comeback is: but God, your God, is sovereign. He can do whatever he wants. And if he's most glorified in us when we're most satisfied in him and he cares about his glory infinitely, why doesn't he advance your satisfaction in him, cut the roots of more sins, and therefore get more glory for himself more quickly? And that is an absolutely crucial question (234).

But Christians are said to enjoy *real spiritual freedom* (cf. Jn. 8:36), whereas the above soft determinist view seems to depict us as still in bondage to sin and God's hidden will to refuse us grace. The soft libertarian can explain the real spiritual freedom, however, and affirm that God *always* provides a way out of sin (cf. Gal. 5:16). They accomplish this by affirming i) a *real ability* in believers to overcome sin, ii) a real capacity to nevertheless continue in sin (cf. 1 Jn. 1:8-2:2), & iii) the *full credit* being due to God's grace which enables us to overcome in moments of temptation.

Lastly, when we consider the *stage of the Saints in Glory*, we see that the reason they are unable to be tempted is that they enjoy the perfect freedom of integrity (i.e. something not possessed in the same way in the Garden by Adam & Eve). Thus, although the soft determinist has an explanation for why the saints in heaven won't sin (i.e. God is responsible for giving the saints grace to never sin), she cannot explain the *relevant difference* between heaven and the Garden which explains why perfect humanity fell in one case but not the other. Soft libertarians can, or so they claim anyway. We'll have to wait until chapter 4 to see the prospects for success more clearly.

QUESTION: WHICH VIEW SEEMS MORE IN KEEPING WITH SCRIPTURE AT THIS POINT, DETERMINISM OR LIBERTARIANISM? WHAT DO YOU LIKE & DISLIKE ABOUT BOTH VIEWS?

Let us conclude, then, with a summary of Keathley's philosophical misgivings regarding determinism and an illustration from church history that allows us to see how the competing theories of free will interpret actual events.

First, Keathley objects to determinism because i) it is too simplistic an account of freedom that counts such people as heroin addicts as free, ii) it's mechanistic such that humans appear to be automata, iii) it's a view of freedom that fits better with a materialistic view of the world than a supernaturalistic worldview, iv) it reduces human beings from special and real agents made in God's image to something no different than animals or automata, & v) it strains our understanding of the relationship between God and the world.

Now, consider Martin Luther's encounter with Charles V in 1521, who put Luther under pressure to recant his allegedly heretical views opposed to the Catholic teachings to which Luther had once submitted. Rather than retract, on this day, Luther met his invitation to retract his teachings with the following statement: "My conscience is bound by the Word of God. I cannot and will not retract...*I can do no other*" (63-4). Why could Luther do no other? If we follow the determinist, the reason is that Luther had been determined since the beginning of creation to not recant. But notice the difference as Keathley explains it when we consider the soft determinist's view: "Luther's 'inability' to recant was actually freedom in the truest sense of the word. By God's grace, he had the liberating strength to follow his convictions. The way soft libertarianism distinguishes between the different types of ability – freedom of responsibility and freedom of integrity – helps us understand the very intricate relationship between ability and accountability. Luther declared his conscience bound, but according to the soft libertarian paradigm, on that day he was the freest man in Europe" (Keathley 100).

O is for Overcoming Grace

Salvation & Sovereignty (Chapter 3) by Kenneth Keathley

In this chapter, Keathley presents an *ambulatory* model of grace, considers three Calvinistic arguments that anything short of irresistible grace results in some form of Pelagianism (i.e. merit-based salvation) & ends with a summary of the advantages of the overcoming grace model. In addition, two puzzles continually emerge throughout the chapter: (i) for Calvinists, the puzzle is how there can be a *well-meant offer* to all persons when God's grace is irresistible & (ii) for non-Calvinists, the puzzle is how to explain human rejection of the gospel without entailing that salvific grace is not *monergistic* (i.e. literally, 'of one work'; or alternatively, all credit is due to God). Overcoming grace, Keathley claims, provides a model that offers solutions to *both* of these problems.

First, Keathley suggests that we should understand God's overcoming grace for salvation by way of an analogy:

Imagine waking up to find you are being transported by an ambulance to the emergency room. It is clearly evident that your condition requires serious medical help. If you do nothing, you will be delivered to the hospital. However, if for whatever reason you demand to be let out, the driver will comply. He may express regret and give warnings, but he will still let you go. You receive no credit for being taken to the hospital, but you incur the blame for refusing the services of the ambulance (104).

To apply this analogy, the relevant features are that we, like the person being transported to the hospital, are in a spiritually unhealthy position. However, just as consent for transport is necessary in the ambulance, so consent for spiritual operating is expected from us by God. Our options then, are to passively allow the healing work to be done or to actively refuse to consent. Thus, it is *God's active work* that receives the credit for our salvation, and *our active refusal* that renders us blameworthy for our own damnation. Thus, grace becomes both *monergistic & resistible*.

QUESTION: IS THE AMBULANCE ANALOGY BAD IN ANY RESPECTS? WHAT INITIAL WORRIES DO YOU HAVE?

Next, Keathley turns to the first of the three Calvinist arguments in favor of irresistible grace – (1) Receiving grace, for the non-Calvinist, is something we *do*; (2) but anything we *do* is a work; (3) Therefore, the receiving of grace, for the non-Calvinist is a work. Keathley is worried, however, that there is an equivocation in this argument since the word 'do' is ambiguous. There are at least two types of abilities: active and passive. And Keathley thinks that what counts as a work is only an active ability. For example, I have the *active ability* to split a log. Moreover, the log has the *passive ability* to be split. And when I split the log, it is a bit strained to say that the log did or contributed to the *work* of splitting. Thus, if the sense of 'do' in the argument is *active*, then premise (1) is false. However, if the sense of 'do' in the argument is *passive*, then premise (2) is false, especially if the ambulance analogy is successful.

The second argument Keathley considers is rejected by some Calvinists but endorsed by other Calvinists – (1) Faith is a gift to the elect given *after* regeneration, from which it follows that (2) our ability to receive faith is a supernatural endowment; but (3) non-Calvinists claim it is not a supernatural endowment; so, (4) either premise (1) or premise (3) must be rejected. The difficulty with understanding how to evaluate this argument rests on which of three understandings of the *order of salvation* is accepted by a given Calvinist. Let's consider all three positions.

According to the *Nonconversionist Position*, the elect are regenerated *from birth*, and thus, any conversion experience is misleading if one takes that conversion to be a moment of becoming a child of God. You already were a child of God on this view, and thus, the expression of faith one might have later down the line *really does* come after regeneration, and is a conversion in name only. There's no real conversion going on. According to the *Regeneration-precedes-faith (but there's real conversion) Position* takes its cues from such Scriptural passages as John 3:5, "Unless one be born again, he cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven," which seem to teach that regeneration precedes salvific faith. And thus, for them, regeneration and the moment of salvation must be understood as independent events in the life of a member of the elect. And lastly, the *Effectual Call Position* claims that we are called by God, irresistibly convert to Christianity & then are regenerated by the work of the Holy Spirit. So the first view denies that God's gift of grace is different from the moment of regeneration. The second view claims that regeneration is different from God's gift of faith and comes before it. Of course, the worry with both the second and first views is that neither can do justice to the constant refrain from Scripture that we are saved (i.e. regenerated) by faith. The phrase *by faith* seems to imply a causal ordering of faith causing regeneration. The third view handles this difficulty by claiming that the effectual call is the initial gift of faith which *irresistibly leads* to regeneration. Thus, faith comes first and leads to regeneration. The primary difference between this *effectual call* view & Keathley's *overcoming grace* view is whether or not humanity can resist the monergistic work of God.

The first fundamental points Keathley affirms with *all three* of these views is that *faith is a gift*. The question is whether or not such gifts must *necessarily* be received, as Acts 16:14 might be thought to indicate (i.e. "One who heard us was a woman named

Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. *The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul*). The second point, and a worry for the two latter views, is that they distinguish between the effective special calling of the elect and a general calling that goes out to the non-elect. Keathley thinks, however, that we are straining heavily if we think such a distinction is prescribed by Scripture. Indeed, the closing statement of the Bible is a universal invitation to life (i.e. Rev. 22:17 – “Come! Anyone who hears should say, ‘Come!’ And the one who is thirsty should come. Whoever desires should take the living water as a gift”), which is an invitation offered by the *bride of Christ* (i.e. the elect!), so the invitation cannot reasonably be taken to be directed at only the elect. Thirdly, and against the first two views, faith clearly precedes regeneration, and thus, it is not merely *evidential* of one’s having been regenerated. And lastly, against the third view that depicts grace as *irresistible*, Scripture seems to teach that it is possible to resist God’s grace (e.g. 2 Cor. 6:1, “Don’t receive God’s grace in vain,” which is a weird imperative coming from Paul if grace is really *irresistible*).

The final Calvinist argument that non-Calvinists must accept that one their view of God’s grace, faith results in merit is as follows: (i) faith is a virtue in Scripture (e.g. Rom. 12:3-6, 1 Cor. 13:13, Heb. 11:1, 6), (ii) and thus, anyone who has faith will automatically be *better* in terms of character than those without faith, (iii) and this follows since virtues just are dispositions to act in excellent ways along some dimension (e.g. courage or temperance). But this seems a silly complaint, surely. After all, if we think of faith as a virtue that God bestows on us through an act of grace, there is no merit in our virtuous state for *us*. It was not our active contribution to salvation that lead to its development, but God’s. Thus, concludes Keathley, none of the three Calvinist arguments can establish that non-Calvinists *must* endorse semi-Pelagianism in their soteriology. And what’s more important, he cannot see how the General Call to non-elect persons can be seen as a *well-meant offer*, as Scripture suggests. Therefore, he suggests that the overcoming grace model is the best option.

QUESTION: WAS KEATHLEY ENTIRELY FAIR TO THE CALVINISTS? IS IT FAIR FOR HIM TO ATTRIBUTE THE PASSIVE/ACTIVE ABILITY DISTINCTION TO PAUL OR JOHN? OR IS THIS SIMPLY TO CONFUSE THE IDEAS OF GREEK CULTURE WITH THOSE OF THE JEWISH CULTURE IN WHICH THE APOSTLES WROTE?

After completing his argument in favor of the *overcoming grace* model, Keathley suggests that the model can be seen at work in John 1:11-13:

He came to His own [i.e., Jesus Christ was genuinely offered as Messiah to His people, the Jews]. And His own people did not receive Him [i.e., they resisted a salvation that was truly available to them]. But to all who did receive Him, He gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in His name [i.e., all who met the condition of faith were birthed into the family of God], who were born, not of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God [i.e., yet all this is a monergistic gracious work of God] (126).

Next, Keathley suggests that there are at least 12 *Advantages* of his ambulatory model of grace. As he puts it, the *overcoming grace model* is consistent with... (i) the Biblical tension of divine sovereignty and human responsibility, (ii) the gracious nature of salvation, (iii) the conditionality of salvation, (iv) a “*well-meant offer of the gospel to all*,” (v) the culpability of those who resist, (vi) God’s *genuine* expressions of distress & grief over non-belief, (vii) a spectrum of responses to God’s gift of grace, (viii) the limited and temporary nature of God’s call, (ix) the hardening of the unbeliever, (x) soft libertarianism, (xi) the Molinist view of election [see chapter 5 for more detail], & (xii) the idea that salvation is all of divine grace & damnation all of fallen humanity.

QUESTION: WHICH OF THESE “ADVANTAGES” MIGHT A CALVINIST CONTEST OR BE ABLE TO ACCOMMODATE HERSELF? DO ANY OF THEM SEEM TO BE A BIT OF A STRETCH IF ONE IS COMMITTED TO SOVEREIGNTY?

Before closing, let’s think more deeply about advantages (vii) & (ix)—i.e. an array of responses to God’s call & the hardening of the heart. Acts gives us a number of different types of responses to God’s call, including: glad reception (2:41; 4:4), incomplete conversion (8:13, 20-23), dramatic conversion preceded by a time of hostility (9:1-9), resistance (13:45-52), “trembling” with fear but eventual disinterest by Felix (24:24-26), etc. One might wonder how truly irresistible grace would result in such a variation of responses (not to mention the resistance). Secondly, it’s important to see how God can indeed *harden the heart* of the wicked, not by actively shaping their will, but rather, by choosing to withhold grace. This might sound problematic, and it is for a Calvinist, but if one adopts the soft libertarian view of choice, some other aspects of Scripture throw light on why God is not being unjust or unloving for withholding grace: (A) God’s withholding of grace in such cases is always an act of judgment, (B) only comes about in the context of prior rejections of grace [2 Thess. 2:10-12] & (C) it always follows a period of self-hardening as it does with the case of Pharaoh in Exodus.

QUESTION: THIS IS AN INTERESTING WAY TO DEPICT HARDENING OF HEART. IS THERE A DIFFERENT WAY OF THINKING ABOUT GOD’S HARDENING OF THE HEART?

S is for Sovereign Election

Salvation & Sovereignty (Chapter 5) by Kenneth Keathley

In this chapter, Keathley tells us quite explicitly he will argue “that what Calvinists want to achieve in infralapsarianism [i.e. the view that God *permitted* the Fall, while maintaining absolute & unconditional sovereign control over the history of the world], Molinism actually accomplishes” (141). The two doctrines of note for this discussion are (i) *God’s sovereignty* – rule and control over all things & (ii) *God’s permission* – allowance that things other than God have a degree of granted causal contribution to the world, giving them responsibility for *some* of what occurs in the world rather than God. Now, Arminians deny that God’s sovereignty is *actively* present in election because God only elects the *corporate* church, whoever might belong to that group. Molinists and Calvinists, in contrast, affirm the stronger doctrine that God elects *individuals* to salvation¹; however, they come apart with respect to the *mode* of election: (i) Molinists claim God elects us through his foreknowledge and middle knowledge while (ii) Calvinists claim God elects us through his omnipotent and irresistible will. Now, Keathley discusses the *supralapsarian view* in the chapter, but for our discussion, we will ignore it for the following reason: Whereas Arminians deny God’s sovereignty in the above puzzle, *supralapsarians* deny God’s permission. So there is no conceptual puzzle for either of these views. Rather, their puzzle is one of Scriptural fit, but we’re concerned with the conceptual puzzle of fitting sovereignty and permission together. So, we will only consider *Molinism* and *Infralapsarian Calvinism*.

So let’s consider the motivation for including doctrines of election and permission in the first place. With respect to *election*, it seems that passages including Eph. 1:4 (i.e. God chose us “in [Christ], before the foundation of the world”) and Rom. 8:29 (“For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers”) give us sufficient Scriptural reason to adopt some sort of doctrine of election. With respect to *permission*, the most striking motivation is derived from the desire to avoid labeling God as *the author of sin*. Bruce Ware, himself an *infralapsarian*, puts the motivation this way:

It seems to me, that the strain in Calvinism that has been reluctant to embrace the “permissive will of God” [i.e. *supralapsarianism*] simply rejects one of the very conceptual tools necessary to account for God’s moral innocence in regard to evil. Surely more is needed than just this manner of divine activity. But I don’t see how we can proceed if God’s sovereign dealings in matters of good and evil are, in fact, symmetrical.²

And so, the initial motivation for a doctrine of divine permission seems to be a motivation grounded in moral intuition and the apparent *logical consequences* of causal determinism. But of course, this is not to say that such a position is *not* motivated by Scripture, for the affirmations throughout Scripture concerning *resistance, conditionality, contingency & the like* can all be incorporated into a scriptural case for God’s permissiveness with respect to a large number of events and persons. And thus, Scripture provides *prima facie* (i.e. at first glance) support for endorsing a doctrine of *permission* as well.

QUESTION: ARE THERE ANY SCRIPTURES YOU HAVE IN MIND THAT MIGHT PUSH BACK AGAINST THE IDEA OF DIVINE PERMISSION? OR ANY OTHER WORRIES ABOUT MAKING ROOM FOR THAT SORT OF DOCTRINE?

Molinism seems quite capable of combining a doctrine of election with one of divine permission. The question of interest, however, is whether or not infralapsarian Calvinism can do the same. And Keathley thinks that the infralapsarian *cannot* accommodate both doctrines without sacrificing something else from the Calvinistic doctrinal package. For instance, consider the doctrine of *causal determinism*, which claims that everything which occurs in the physical universe was directly intended and brought about by God. It seems very difficult to imagine adopting *both* this position and a view of *permission* simultaneously.³ In addition, according to classic *infralapsarianism*, reprobation, despite resulting from God’s permissiveness (whatever that means), is still the result of God’s *sovereign good pleasure* (whatever that means too): “Not all, but some only, are elected, while others are passed by in the eternal decree; whom God, out of His sovereign good pleasure, has decreed to leave in the common misery” (Art. 15). But the idea that reprobation brings God pleasure seems in tension with Biblical claims that God does “not delight in the destruction of the wicked” (Ezekiel 18:23). Indeed, a staunchly supralapsarian Calvinist, David Engelsma, puts it this way:

If reprobation is the decree not to give a man faith, it is patently false to say that unbelief is the cause of reprobation. That would be the same as to say that my decision not to give a beggar a quarter is due to the beggar’s not having a quarter. That reprobation is an unconditional decree is also plain from the fact that if unbelief were the cause of

¹ This is not to claim that Calvinists and Molinists *deny* that there is a corporate election. It just denies that the corporate election is *primary*.

² Bruce Ware, *God’s Greater Glory*, 26.

³ See Peter van Inwagen’s discussion of *A Brave New World* in his book *The Problem of Evil* (2006).

reprobation, all men would have been reprobated, and would not have been elected, for all men are equally unbelieving and disobedient.⁴

Keathley basically, then, agrees with Engelsma and thinks that infralapsarian Calvinism is simply an incoherent position. Now, some authors—such as John Frame, Paul Jewett & Tom Schreiner—either adopt agnosticism about the legitimacy of the permissive/sovereign will distinction or appeal to mystery. What’s worrisome with this maneuver, however, is that there’s a difference between paradox which results from not having *enough information* (e.g. explaining how the physics of microphysical particles can be combined with the physics governing medium-sized masses) and paradox which results from deriving a contradiction between theses (e.g. (1) All events are caused; (2) Human actions are events; (3) Some human actions are free, that is, not caused). With the latter sort of paradox, we know one of the three theses *must* be false if we rule out the possibility of equivocating, and this seems to be the sort of paradox faced by infralapsarian Calvinists; that is, it’s not an *epistemic paradox* but a *logical paradox*.

When we turn to the Molinist’s way of accommodating permission and election, we find that the *permission* enters into the second logical moment of God’s knowledge; that is, God’s *middle knowledge*, which contains his knowledge of what all free creatures would freely do if they were put in various circumstances. God’s permission is represented by the restriction of his creative activity to only pick out *feasible worlds*, a set of worlds that is picked out by the free choices of human persons. God’s action of *election*, then, is found in the Molinistic model when God *chooses* which particular feasible world God will create. And this picture, by the way, nicely fits the ordering of election we saw in Romans 8:29, where God’s *foreknowledge* precedes (logically) his act of predestination.

QUESTION: WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE PARADOX KEATHLEY PUTS TO INFRALAPSARIANS? IS IT REALLY A LOGICAL RATHER THAN EPISTEMIC PARADOX?

According to Keathley, Molinism has at least *seven* advantages over Calvinism or Arminianism with respect to the doctrines of permission and election: (i) Molinism can affirm God’s general call as genuine, unlike *consistent* Calvinism, (ii) Molinism can explain why election is unconditional but rejection of the unbeliever is conditional, unlike the *Arminian* (cf. “It is up to God whether we find ourselves in a world in which we are predestined, but it is up to us whether we are predestined in the world in which we find ourselves”⁵), (iii) Molinism can affirm *particular election*, unlike Arminianism, (iv) Molinism can affirm a robust role for God’s foreknowledge to play in election, something which neither the Arminian nor the Calvinist affirms⁶, (v) Molinism helps us understand the tension between human responsibility and divine sovereignty better as seen by its treatment of Romans 9, (vi) Molinism puts *mystery* in God’s infinite attributes in response to the question of why some people don’t believe, rather than in God’s character as Calvinism does, & (vii) Molinism has a *real* concept of permission, unlike Calvinists, in that for them, ‘permit’ means permit, rather than cause.

QUESTION: ARE ANY OF THESE ALLEGED ADVANTAGES NOT REALLY ADVANTAGES? WHAT ABOUT ROMANS 9? DOES MOLINISM REALLY GIVE US A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF ROMANS 9?

Indeed, what ought we to say about Romans 9? Well, before discussing a proper treatment of Romans 9, it’s important for us to make some distinctions or take note of things found in Scripture: (1) **Scripture affirms both individual and corporate election** (e.g. Acts 4:27-28, “for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate [i.e. *individual* election & they are mentioned *by name*], along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel [i.e. *corporate* election of people groups], to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place”); (2) **the possibility of disobedience is held to be consistent with God’s sovereign election** (e.g. Galatians 1:15, “But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me...” & Acts 26:19, “Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was *not disobedient* [which seems to presuppose disobedience was an open option, even if really unlikely] to the heavenly vision...”). Notice that in both of the passages quoted here, we have Paul reflecting on his own conversion in Damascus, which he seems to see as both one of being *individually* elect but also *permissive* (i.e. contingent on Paul’s chosen obedience).

So, what we have to do when approaching Romans 9 is ask ourselves, *is Paul discussing individual or corporate election*, and it’s clear that he’s teaching *corporate* election here. And this is significant since the corporate body which God elects to salvation *doesn’t get a say* in election. And thus, seeing no mention of the possibility of resistance is not evidence that *individuals* get no say in their election, but rather, that *corporate entities* get no say. But that’s consistent with individual freedom playing a part.

⁴ David Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel*, 57-8.

⁵ William Lane Craig, “‘No Other Name’: A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation through Christ,” *Faith and Philosophy* 6.2 (April 1989), 185.

⁶ And Calvinists explicitly deny God’s foreknowledge a role by interpreting ‘foreknew’ Romans 8:29 as ‘foreloved’.

E is for Eternal Life

Salvation & Sovereignty (Chapter 6) by Kenneth Keathley

In this chapter, Keathley evaluates answers (and offers his own) two questions: (i) can we have assurance of salvation? & (ii) is it possible for someone who is regenerated to apostatize (or what's slightly different: even if it's possible, does anyone *actually* apostatize)? It seems clear that if a position entails an affirmative answer to the second question, then a negative answer will probably follow for the first question, and although Keathley mentions such views (e.g. the Roman Catholic position and Arminians of a certain sort), he disagrees because he feels strongly that Scripture affirms the possibility of assurance of one's salvation:

For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day (2 Tim. 1:12)

[You] wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:7b-8)

In addition to passages affirming assurance (*note: Keathley treats passages which teach perseverance as also teaching assurance, but these are different concepts*), there are passages that warn against the possibility of *falling away*:

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame (Heb. 6:4-6)

You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace...You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? (Gal. 5:4, 7)

As a result, anyone seeking to affirm the possibility of assurance by way of first affirming the perseverance of true Christians must also explain why the various warning passages we encounter in Scripture are there. Keathley's answer is that such passages provide us a litmus test to give us evidence of our regenerated state, but that assurance is not found in this evidence, but rather, in one's certain knowledge of Christ's atoning sacrifice applied to one's life (i.e. forensic justification). The following will be mainly expository, followed by some of my own worries for Keathley's view.

QUESTION: WHERE ARE YOU STARTING FROM? HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER THE TWO QUESTIONS WITH WHICH WE BEGAN?

Keathley considers three historical positions for answering the question of assurance: the views of *Roman Catholicism, the Reformers & the Puritans*. Roman Catholics deny that assurance is possible since until one's death the possibility of committing a mortal sin without repentance remains. In fact, the Council of Trent (1545-63) explicitly condemned anyone who claimed to have assurance of their salvation in reaction to the position of the Reformers. According to Calvin, *faith* is a form of "firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us," and so, someone who truly has faith in Christ has knowledge of their membership in the elect. Such a view, given the emphasis on *certainty*, created historical obsession and fear among the Puritans. Because they seemed to lack certainty of their salvation, they attempted to find it in the form of two deductive syllogisms, which provided the closest claim to certainty of which they were aware (i.e. due to Aristotelian epistemology): **Practical** – (1) If effectual grace is manifested in me by good works, then I am elect; (2) effectual grace is manifested in me by good works; (3) ∴ I am elect...**Mystical** – (A) If I experience the inward confirmation of the Spirit, then I am elect; (B) I experience the inward confirmation of the Spirit; (C) ∴ I am one of the elect.

None of these positions, thinks Keathley, is quite right since the first one rejects assurance altogether, while the latter two locate assurance in *sanctification*; that is, they introspect about their own good *works* and *experience* of the Spirit in order to find assurance. On the contrary, however, Keathley thinks we must find assurance in *justification*; that is, in the finality of Christ's atonement and sacrifice which fulfilled the covenant made between humanity and God.

QUESTION: IS KEATHLEY RIGHT TO THINK THE REFORMERS AND PURITANS WERE LOOKING IN THE WRONG PLACE?

Turning now to the question of apostasy (i.e. falling out of God's grace), Keathley briefly mentions the Arminian and Augustinian views, both of which claim that apostasy is possible, and moreover, actually occurs. According to Keathley, they take seriously the warning passages above while ignoring completely the passages of assurance. So he rejects them both. Next, Keathley considers three positions according to which **apostasy is not possible**. Beginning with Karl Barth's *Implicit Universalism* he praises

Barth for recognizing the importance of having *both* a Christological beginning and *end* in doctrines of assurance. Thus, apostasy must be impossible given that it is *Christ* whose work in us results in sanctification and not our own work. Next, Keathley discusses the *Once Saved Always Saved* position, which takes the warning passages to deal primarily with chances to get or lose out on rewards in the afterlife *aside from* salvation itself (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10 & 1 Cor. 3:10-15). The passages teaching of such rewards, thinks Keathley, are important to consider, but he rejects OSAS in the end because he thinks that at least some warning passages really do warn against apostasy (e.g. 1 Cor. 9:27). Last, Keathley considers the view, advocated by Wayne Grudem, called *Evidence of Genuineness*, a view that claims, *necessarily*, the fruits of salvation will eventually manifest themselves in the life of the believer. Keathley doesn't tell us the sense of necessarily here, but it seems to mean that given sufficient time post-conversion, the fruits of salvation will result, and I take it this way since I assume the necessity operator is not intended to rule out death bed conversions. The only weakness of this view offered by Keathley comes to its failure to show how the warning passages are *future-directed*, that is, they warn against *the future possibility* of apostasy, whereas using such passages as litmus tests to determine if one is elect by recollecting the *past* seems to exhibit a misunderstanding.

Lastly, Keathley considers another three views **according to which apostasy is threatened yet not possible**. So, they differ from the previous positions in attempting to take the warning passages at face value. The first view, held by D. A. Carson, teaches that the reason for the threat of apostasy is simply *irreconcilable* or *mysterious*. Keathley thinks this is a cop out, so he sets it aside. The view of Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Caneday, on the other hand, gets much more face time. This *Means of Salvation* view teaches that while apostasy is threatened, the reason for the threat is *not* that it is possible, but rather, that the threats are *means* by which God assures the salvation of some elect. In support of this view, they claim that scholars ought to include an *inaugurated eschatological hermeneutical principle* in their Scriptural interpretation of seeing salvation and the Gospel from its *already-but-not-yet* aspect. The *already* part is accommodated, then, by their commitment to the impossibility of apostasy, while the *not yet* part is accommodated by the *means-to-an-end* purpose for which warning passages are included in Scripture. The final view, by William Lane Craig, is a *Middle Knowledge* appropriation of the *Means to Salvation* view. Craig points out that God's use of warning passages to preserve the elect implies that God knows what those elect *would have done were the passages absent*; namely, they would have committed apostasy. Thus, he thinks Schreiner and Caneday are illegitimately helping themselves to the doctrine of middle knowledge, which requires the *real possibility* of apostasy, something they deny. In Keathley's words: If God is using the warnings as the means to insure perseverance, then either the saints would fall without the warnings (which is contrary to how Reformed theology understands how God's grace works in the believer) or the saints would persevere even without the warnings (which would make the warnings superfluous). So Craig endorses Schreiner and Caneday's claim that warning passages are *means to salvation*, but he adds that from this, it follows that apostasy is possible, even though no one *actually* apostatizes (i.e. because of passages which teach the assurance of salvation).

QUESTION: WHAT SOUNDS CORRECT ABOUT THESE VIEWS? DO ANY OF THEM SEEM TO TAKE SCRIPTURE WITHOUT SUFFICIENT SERIOUSNESS IN PART?

Very briefly, Keathley lists *four basic tenets* of his **Modified Evidence of Genuineness** harmonization of the difficulties surrounding assurance and apostasy: (1) *The only basis for assurance is the objective work of Christ* (i.e. Christ is the foundation of assurance; good works merely support and confirm); (2) *Assurance is the essence of saving faith* (i.e. a certain knowledge of salvation is simultaneous with being saved. Subsequent doubts may come, but a core conviction remains); (3) *Saving faith perseveres or remains until the day when it gives way to sight* (i.e. perseverance is a faith that cannot be annihilated. Perseverance is more a promise than it is a requirement); (4) *There are rewards that are subsequent to salvation for the believer to win or lose* (i.e. believers will be judged and rewarded according to their service).

QUESTION: IS KEATHLEY'S VIEW AN IMPROVEMENT? WHAT DO YOU LIKE OR DISLIKE ABOUT IT?

Here are my thoughts. Keathley's confusing *justification* (i.e. a forensic concept) with *assurance* (i.e. an epistemic concept). Moreover, since he thinks *certainly* essentially accompanies saving faith at the point of justification, his view will inevitably provide very little assurance to anyone who's read any Descartes. He claims that *certain knowledge* is consistent with later doubts, but that just seems false. Consider the sentence, "I know for *certain* that the biological daughter of Dan and Kathleen Naberhaus is my wife, but I could be wrong" (after all, she could have been accidentally switched out with another baby at the hospital). It sounds incoherent. In fact any sentence of the form, 'I am *absolutely certain* that *p*, but I could be wrong' sounds incoherent. But, if I remove the word 'certain' from that sentence, the oddness decreases. It's no longer incoherent, just unusual. As a result, a good doctrine of assurance should not require *certain knowledge*, something which epistemologists (and the Puritans) have generally concluded leads inevitably to extreme skepticism (of the existence of the external world for Descartes & the assurance of salvation for the Puritans). In addition, I think Keathley pays insufficient attention to the language of 'faith' in the New Testament. Just as 'bank' can mean either a financial or river bank, so 'faith' can express a number of meanings, sometimes *trust*, sometimes *knowledge* & sometimes *an orientation of one's will towards a long-term goal or project* (e.g. Abraham's becoming the patriarch of God's chosen people). Rightly parsing these things out would result in a much better doctrine of assurance.

S is for Singular Redemption

Salvation & Sovereignty (Chapter 7) by Kenneth Keathley

In this chapter, Keathley argues for the *Singular Redemption (SR)* component of ROSES (i.e. the view that Christ's atonement is sufficient to save all humanity, but effective only for those who believe). *SR* is contrasted with *Limited Atonement* (i.e. the view that Christ died *only*, but effectively, for the elect; henceforth, *LA*) and *General Atonement* (i.e. the view that Christ died *merely* for a corporate body but in *particular* for no human; henceforth, *GA*).

Keathley does away fairly quickly with *GA* since it includes with it a commitment to the idea that Christ did not die for our sins, but merely to fulfill the human end of the Adamic covenant (hence, Christ is the new Adam). The crucial part of this view, for *GA*, is that Christ does not die *for* our sins (i.e. his death is not a substitutionary payment for our sin), but rather, they are merely overlooked. Yet, Paul clearly states in 1 Corinthians 15:3 that "Christ died for our sins," and so, *GA* does not seem to be a live option.

QUESTION: THIS IS PRETTY QUICK. DO YOU THINK A MODIFICATION OF *GA* MIGHT DO THE TRICK? IF SO, TRY TO THINK WHETHER OR NOT THE PROPOSED MODIFICATION IS DIFFERENT FROM *SR*.

When Keathley turns to *LA*, he begins by noting the historical tension in which this particular constituent of TULIP resulted. For instance, 4-point Calvinism, which also goes by the name Amyraldianism, denies *L*. Indeed, Amyraldian theologian Kevin Kennedy has completed an exegetical project of Calvin's writings in which he argues that Calvin was himself a 4-pointer. In one text, for example, Calvin states, "God commends to us the salvation of all men without exception, even as Christ suffered for the sins of the whole world."¹ However, proponents of *LA* find Amyraldianism bizarre. J. I. Packer puts it this way:

For the five points, though separately stated, are really inseparable. They hang together; you cannot reject one without rejecting them all.²

And I must say, I'm sympathetic with such an assessment of 4-point Calvinism. Here's my very brief and informal argument that TULIP falls or hangs together:

Suppose we give up *L* and adopt, then, Unlimited Atonement. Then if we still understand Christ's atonement to be accompanied by Irresistible Grace, universalism seems to quickly follow. But universalism seems false, or at least, most orthodox Christians assume so. Thus, if one wants to maintain a rejection of *L*, then *I* must go as well. So, at this point we stand as TUP's rather than TULIP's, but without *I*, it's hard to imagine that grace is unconditional. That is, once grace is considered *resistible*, then it seems as if *not resisting* is a condition on receiving grace, and thus, *U* must go as well. And now, we're TP's, but if you have any doubt about the validity of *T* (since it seems clear that at least *some comparative goodness* is exhibited by non-believers, or even great amounts [e.g. Gandhi]), then you'll want to get rid of it. And since *P* presupposes that the assurance of perseverance comes through the *irresistibility* of God's grace, you'll have to give a modified view if you want to maintain a doctrine of assurance. Thus, TULIP is plausibly an all or nothing summary of Calvinistic soteriology.

QUESTION: WHAT DO YOU THINK? CAN ANYTHING BE SAID ON BEHALF OF THE AMYRALDIAN HERE?

So let us turn now to six arguments offered on behalf of *LA*. (1) It seems that rejecting *LA* commits us to the claim that Christ's grace is *wasted* at the cross. *In response*, Keathley offers two considerations: i] even Calvinists acknowledge that there is wasted *common grace*, and so, why is the waste of Christ's grace any different? ii] Moreover, it is the rejection of grace offered to non-elect persons which explains why their condemnation is deserved. (2) Since Christ's prayer in John 17:9 is limited in its scope to the elect, the atonement must also be limited. *In response*, Keathley points out that there's no non-question-begging reason to think that Christ's limited prayer teaches a limited atonement. *SR* simply claims that Christ's prayer is for those who believe (i.e. those for whom grace is effective) although the atonement is for all (i.e. those for whom grace is sufficient). And this is much easier to square with Scriptures like John 3:16. (3) Rejecting *LA* implies universalism. *In response*, Keathley points out that no one who rejects irresistible grace is likely to be moved by this argument. (4) Rejecting *LA* implies God lacks sovereignty since God would not be the ultimate explanation for the eternal destination of saved and reprobate. *In response*, Keathley notes that this requires a *supralapsarian* view, which he rejects for reasons given in chapter 5. (5) Scripture teaches that Christ dies *for his own* (e.g. Matt 1:21; John 10:3-4, 14-16, 25-26; Acts 20:28; Rom 5:8), which is best explained by *LA*. *In response* – In Galatians 2:20, Paul says, Christ

¹ John Calvin, quoted by K. Kennedy, *Union with Christ and the Extent of the Atonement in Calvin* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002): 28-31.

² J. I. Packer, "Introductory Essay," in *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, [1647] 1959), 6 & R. C. Sproul Sr., *Chosen by God* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1986), 204.

“gave Himself for me [i.e. Paul],” but this doesn’t teach that the scope of the atonement includes *all and only* Paul. Why should we, then, take these other passages any differently? (6) If one rejects *LA*, then condemnation of humans is an instance of double jeopardy that is contrary to God’s character. *In response*, Keathley points out that if a pardon is offered to someone for a crime and they reject it, then it is perfectly just for their original punishment to be applied. Moreover, this point serves better as a premise for eternal security since applying the original penalty *after* one has previously accepted the pardon, due to some mortal sin or whatever, seems akin to double jeopardy.

QUESTION: WHICH OF THESE ARGUMENTS FOR *LA* DO YOU THINK HAS THE MOST PROMISE? WHY? WOULD YOU RESTATE ANY OF THEM OR OFFER DIFFERENT RESPONSES TO ANY OF THEM?

Let’s look now at five arguments for *Singular Redemption*. (1) Since Scripture teaches that Christ died for the “world,” *SR* is true. Here’s a brief list: John 1:29, 3:16-7, 4:42; 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 John 2:2, 4:14. Also, the Apostle John distinguishes ‘the world’ from ‘the elect’ in John 17:9 & 1 John 2:15-7, so it’s weird to say that ‘the world’ is elliptical for ‘the world of the elect’. Also, 2 Peter 2:1 distinguishes between those for whom Christ died and those who are saved (“But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even *denying the Master who bought them*, and will bring swift destruction on themselves.”). (2) It’s easier to reconcile a *universal view of atonement* with *limited statements* than vice versa. (3) The effects of Christ’s atonement in Romans 5 are seen as *symmetrical* to the effects of Adam’s fall. Of course, the effects of Adam’s fall were nearly universal, but nevertheless conditional on sin, whereas Christ’s *sufficient grace* is universal, but his *effective grace* is conditional on faith. (4) Assuming only *LA* and *SR* are live options, *SR* explains the well-meant offering of the Gospel much better than *LA*. (5) If *LA* were true, then it would be false that the reprobate die (spiritually) because they reject Christ; so *LA* must be false and *SR* true.

QUESTION: WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE SCRIPTURAL PASSAGES KEATHLEY GIVES IN SUPPORT OF *SR*? WHAT ABOUT THE ARGUMENTS? HOW DO THEY STAND UP?

Lastly, I’ll conclude with an interesting passage from John Calvin that definitely makes you wonder what his actual soteriological views were:

That, then is how our Lord Jesus bore the sins and iniquities of many. But in fact, this word ‘many’ is often as good as equivalent to ‘all.’ And indeed our Lord Jesus was offered to all the world. For it is not speaking of three or four when it says: ‘God so loved the world, that he spared not His only Son.’ But yet we must notice what the Evangelist adds in this passage: ‘That whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but obtain eternal life.’ Our Lord Jesus suffered for all and there is neither great nor small who is not inexcusable today, for we can obtain salvation in Him. Unbelievers who turn away from Him and who deprive themselves of Him by their malice are today doubly culpable. For how will they excuse their ingratitude in not receiving the blessing in which they could share by faith?³

QUESTION: ANY QUESTIONS REMAINING? WHAT PARTS OF THIS STUDY HAVE BEEN MOST HELPFUL TO YOU? ARE THERE ANY PARTS YOU WOULD YOU WANT TO GO BACK AND READ FOR YOURSELF, AND WHY?

QUESTION: WHERE DO YOU FIND YOURSELF WITH RESPECT TO THE DEBATE OVER TULIP & ROSES? HOW DO DIFFERING VIEWS ON SUCH THINGS AFFECT HOW WE LIVE OUR LIVES WITH OTHERS? IN A REFORMED COMMUNITY? IN A NON-REFORMED COMMUNITY? WITH NON-BELIEVERS? ETC.

³ John Calvin, *Sermons on Isaiah’s Prophecy of the Death and Passion of Christ* (London: James Clark, [1559] 1956), 141 (emphasis added) by Kenneth Keathley, 208.