



“Does God Love All or Only Some Persons?”

(The ‘Calvinistic’ God Compared To
The New Testament God!)

By

Ron G. Christian

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"JOY IS ONE OF THE 'FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT'!" (Galatians 5:22, 23)

Joy is the attitude of the Christian who is 'constitutionally happy'! Joy is experienced as a result of one's knowledge that he serves a God of love, not a God of vengeance.

If you do not sense that you are favored by the God who created you, then you certainly will not feel good about yourself, and you will have no motivation to think well of other people! Everything 'hinges' on your concept of God, and on everything and everyone that is 'connected' with God!

I believe that one of the greatest 'deterrents' to happiness and joy and rest and positive affirmation is the embracing of a very false concept of God, namely, the concept of God which too many people have, the concept of God which is embodied in Calvinistic teaching.

The theological concepts embodied in the Calvinistic system have captured and have paralyzed multitudes of sincere folks, for generations. I say 'paralyzed', for to accept the teaching of John Calvin (of many years ago) is to accept teachings that bring terror and total fright and debilitating depression to a person! Anyone who accepts the Calvinistic concept of God will be left deeply sadden and terribly insecure about life in general and about his own life after his death specifically! Certainly there will be no happiness or light-heartedness or pleasure or restful assurance about a hopeful future.

Momentarily, I will systematically and briefly share the 'five points' of the Calvinistic system, but, to accent the terror and the tragedy of this theological system, it needs to be said that John Calvin believed that God arbitrarily selected some persons to be saved and other persons to be condemned to hell!

It is a horrifying thought, but John Calvin believed that God actually was honored (glorified) when God sent the unelected ones (the condemned ones) to hell! Calvin obviously did not believe in the 'Universal Love' of God (like the New Testament teaches).

He further believed that God was in control of all things, that all that happened in the world (good and bad events) was simply the unfolding of the perfect will of God. Man had no control of the happenings of the world, and God had total control. Thus, in reality (though it might seem differently to most Calvinistically-oriented persons) man did not have any genuine (authentic) 'free will'! Whatever man 'chose' was actually and merely an 'extension' of the sovereign (hidden) will of God!

Again, let it be repeated: Only when we get rid of the 'killjoys' (i.e., the needless destroyers of joy) in our life, will we be able to embrace the 'joy of the Lord' and, thus, be able to experience 'Holy Laughter' (as God intends us to enjoy).

The teachings of Calvinism have long been some of the greatest 'killjoys' of human life! Countless persons (unsure of their standing and of their status with the sovereign God) have lived a life of misery and even of terror! Not to know if you are going to heaven, after you die (because you don't know if God has 'elected' you), this uncertainty could cause you to 'crack up' (to 'go stark crazy' with fear)!

I need to state (boldly) that there could not be a worse form of religious cruelty than the religious cruelty which is found in the tenets (doctrines) of Calvinism! Calvinism is not a 'friend' to the human race! No unconditional love from a kind Heavenly Father! No assurance of eternal life, no genuine exercise of the human 'free will' but, instead, a debasing and a defaming and a diminishing of the human person!

No joy or happiness or relaxation or assurance or peace or confidence or self-affirmation or boldness and courage in living - none of these strengthening qualities that make life worth living! Certainly no light-heartedness or good-will or 'holy laughter' in personal relationships! How could you 'laugh' at yourself, or laugh at life 'in general', if you were paralyzed with inward fear - fear that God might not have 'chosen' you to be a member of His 'elect family'?

One of the fruits of the Spirit *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness..."* (Galatians

5:22) is JOY. Countless times in the Bible we are exhorted to enjoy the Lord (but how can we enjoy a God who is arbitrary and selective and unfair and actually 'cruel')? Only when we know that we serve a God who (according to the New Testament) is unconditional in His love for us (who 'backs' us totally and who has forgiven us totally), can we 'take a big breath' of release, can we rest secure that we can face life's challenges and can face death's final call with strong assurance!'

Calvinism gives no assurance that any person - even a sincere person - will finally enjoy heaven as his final home (for no one knows if he has been selected by a sovereign God), whereas the God of the New Testament gives wonderful assurance to the obedient believer that his final destiny will be a 'glorious home in heaven'!

Only when a person has security and assurance and peace and love and divine companionship can he feel good about himself, can he feel good about his God, and can he feel good about his fellow human beings.

We must take a serious look: at the dreadful concepts of Calvinism, and contrast this tragic 'way of thinking' about God, with the joyous 'way of thinking' which constitutes the New Testament concept of God (Jesus Christ). If one does not embrace the New Testament concept of God (as seen in the 'face of Jesus Christ'), then there is no 'basis' for happiness, no motivation for enjoying wholesome laughter (including 'holy laughter')!

ARMINIAN VIEW OF LIFE IN CONTRAST TO THE CALVINISTIC VIEW OF LIFE!

Does God desire (will) the salvation of all or of only some persons? This 'key' question reflects the difference between the 'convictions' of Arminians and Calvinists. The former group of persons believes that God desires (wills) the salvation of all persons. The latter group of persons believes that God desires (wills) the salvation of only some persons.

The latter (horrifying) belief is titled 'predestination', that is, God -

before the foundation of the world - chose to 'elect' a portion of the human population to go to heaven, and, consequently, God elected the remainder of the human population to go to hell (and human beings had no 'input' - personal choice - in determining their own eternal destiny)!

As just stated, those Christians who believe that God wills the salvation of only some persons, rather than all persons, are popularly called 'Calvinists', because this teaching of predestination is believed by many to be the 'basic premise' of the theology of John Calvin (1509-1564). He was the well-known and influential systematic theologian of the Protestant Reformation. Calvinism is popularly known by its 'Five Points'.

The following 'Points' are briefly summarized by Donald Bastian (bishop of the Free Methodist Denomination). (He himself is an Arminian theologian and a well-respected writer).

Point One: Even before creation God foreordained the fall of the human race. This was in order to show His mercy by saving a select number. These are the elect of those predestined to salvation. Obviously, those not included in this select number are predestined to be lost even before they exist and therefore before they can sin. This is double predestination.

Point Two: The atonement of Christ includes only those whom God has already chosen to save. All others are therefore excluded. This is limited atonement.

Point Three: The corruption of humankind by sin is complete so that no one is able to call upon God for mercy. This is total depravity.

Point Four: Since God has already elected certain ones to salvation they are unable to resist His call. This is irresistible grace or effectual calling.

Point Five: Finally and logically, those who are thus called and saved will be unable ever to fall away and be lost. This is the perseverance of the saints.

Regarding the above Five Points of the Calvinistic system, Donald Bastian notes the following: "These five points obviously compose a cast-iron system of logic." The following is my brief summary of this 'iron-cast logic' - summary of the sequential connection of these 'Five Points'.

If a person accepts the 'basic premise' of Calvinism i.e.:

Point One - Predestination), that God, in His sovereign will chose only to save a limited number of human beings, then, logically, the atoning blood of Jesus Christ would be 'shed' only for those whom God chose to save.

Point Two - in the system, declares that Christ's death provided only for a 'limited atonement', not an all-inclusive or 'unlimited atonement'.

Point Three - which seeks to preserve or to 'advance' the 'glory of God' and the 'helplessness' of humans, declares that 'man is totally helpless and hopeless', and totally depraved, and totally incapable of making any 'response to God's initiating grace'. Therefore (according to this 'cast-iron logic'), if any human is to be saved, it is God alone who can (and who will) save him. Like a 'giant magnet', divine (all-powerful) grace will draw only those sinners to God whom God (in His sovereign, mysterious will) has chosen to be members of the 'elect' group.

Point Four - is called 'irresistible grace' - the grace, based on God's predestination that is so strong that the 'elect ones' cannot resist it! Those whom God chose (before the foundation of the world) to be the 'elect ones' cannot resist God's 'drawing power'. They (the 'elect ones') have no choice but to come into God's family, for these persons have found 'favor' with God! If God chose to save only some persons, and if man is incapable (because of possessing no 'true free will') to make any type of (genuine) human response to the divine initiative (because of mankind's totally depraved sinful state), then, of course, no human being (whom God has sovereignly chosen to be among the 'elect ones') is capable of 'resisting'

the grace of God (which, again, acts like a 'giant magnet' that 'irresistibly pulls to itself' all those persons whom God has chosen to compose the 'select' or 'elect' group of God's people).

The above-described 'logic' describes the fourth 'point of Calvinism' (which, of course, is another 'corollary point' of the main point (premise) of 'predestination'.

It only 'stands to reason' (at this point in the 'system') that those whom God has 'irresistibly' drawn to Himself (because they are 'members of the elect group') can never NOT be 'elected ones' (which is the last point of the 'Five Point Calvinist system'). In other words, when you are 'once in' (because of God's sovereign choice), you are 'in forever', and you, as a human, cannot remove yourself from the 'elect group' ('perseverance of the saints', or, more popularly 'once saved, always saved').

After evaluating the 'five points' of the Calvinistic system, Donald Bastian makes a simple, yet pointed, comment regarding this theological system: "Linked into (the Calvinist cast-iron system of logic) is a conception of God that seems arbitrary and forbidding. One is saved or lost by eternal decree!"

Bastian then shares a brief history of the debate between the two ways of thinking regarding God and Man and the other doctrines of Calvinism. He notes how the emergence of strong resistance against Calvinism developed (many years ago). Bastian notes: "But in spite of its austerity, Calvinism spread. By the end of the 16th century it had spread from Geneva but was strongest in the Netherlands. There, something startling happened. A Hollander named Richard (Dutch Secretary of State) infuriated the Dutch clergy by attacking Calvinism in his writings. The attack was challenged. A brilliant, trained young Calvinist, Jacobus Arminius, was asked to answer Koornheerts. He set about the task, but his study convinced him that Calvinism was indefensible. His thorough study of the Scriptures gave rise to an evangelical perspective different from austere Calvinism."

The five points of the Calvinistic system were challenged by Jacob Arminius (and others), as a result of serious study of the New Testa-

ment. Calvinism was soon seen as a system of theology that was in clear contradiction of the Biblical picture of God and Man and Sin and Jesus Christ and Salvation.

The following are the 'Five Points' of Arminians, and it will be apparent that these counter-points reflect a clear picture of biblical reality. These five points effectively counter the 'false picture' of God and Man which Calvinism has long espoused!

Point One: God's saving love reaches toward EVERYONE. Those who respond to the call of His Spirit are the elect or the predestinated.

Point Two: Christ died for ALL. The Atonement is adequate for the whole race generally and every person individually. Therefore, the Atonement is UNIVERSAL in its scope.

Point Three: We all are corrupted by sin or totally depraved, but God extends grace to everyone, which enables us to answer God's call and turn to Christ for forgiveness. This is prevenient grace-the grace that goes before.

Point Four: We do not surrender our freedom even after we are saved; thus, we are able (though less likely than some imply) to renounce our faith and be lost.

Then Donald Bastian concisely summarizes the 'main spirit' of the Arminian system of theology. He notes: "These five points are more than a mere answer to Calvinism. They strongly affirm that God loves EVERYONE, that Christ died for us ALL, and that NONE of us is excluded from salvation unless we exclude ourselves by WILLFUL unbelief."

*DID CHRIST'S DEATH MAKE ADEQUATE PROVISION FOR
MANKIND'S SALVATION?*

I propose to you that God chose the human race corporately to be save, and that mankind's salvation was made possible through what Christ voluntarily did at the Cross, thus putting all men into a savable relationship.

In Christ (because of His 'finished work'), God chooses to save all

persons, but only those persons who actually (willingly) accept God's choice (to save all) in reality become the 'chosen' ('elect') ones of God!

Objectively, God (because of Christ's 'work') is reconciled to every human being (sinner), but what God has done objectively for the human race, must be personally and subjectively accepted. The Bible exhorts each person (sinner), "Be ye reconciled unto God!" That is to say, each person must meet the 'conditions' (repentance and faith) in order that he (a sinner) might find peace with a loving and grace-filled and inviting God!

Potential 'blessings' are made possible to every person – all through the 'finished work' of Christ (death and resurrection). "Come unto me, all ye that labor are heavy laden, and I (Christ) will give you rest!" Those who meet the condition ('come unto Christ') enjoy the benefit ('rest unto your soul')! With every promise to be claimed, there is a condition to be met! God says (in His Word), "If you do this, then I will do that!"

To enter into new life (salvation), there are God-given 'conditions' that must be met, if God's promises are to be fulfilled in our life! Salvation (initially) involves the meeting of certain 'conditions' (the exercise of repentance and the exercise of trust/commitment in Christ's provision for salvation). God cannot repent or believe for the sinner (although the gift of repentance and faith are offered to the sinner, because the sinner independently cannot repent of sins and trust in Christ).

However, with all the help and the encouragement that the Spirit offers a sinner, (in an attempt to 'draw him to Christ'), the Spirit cannot 'force' a sinner to 'come to Christ'. And (even though Christians 'hotly' debate this next statement), I believe there is abundant scriptural evidence that, just as God cannot force a sinner to become a believer, so God cannot 'force' a Christian to remain in the 'faith' (that is, to remain in a trusting and obedient relationship with Christ).

There is no 'unconditional eternal security', no irrevocable, no automatic, no certain relationship with God, irrespective of a person's lifestyle, following his conversion experience. 'Eternal Life' is not some sort of 'deposit' that God gives a person. Rather, it is the 'Life

of God within a person', based upon a dynamic relationship of mutual love.

If a person (because of the enticement of sin) draws away from that 'love relationship' with God (and if he begins to 'love' the worldly attractions instead), then either quickly or gradually the love relationship with God will be severed.

*DOES GOD'S 'FAITHFULNESS' AVAIL FOR THE
'UNFAITHFULNESS' OF BACKSLIDDEN?*

Calvinists declare that, in the event a believer falls into sin, his fellowship with God is broken, but (regardless of the kind or the amount of sin) his 'relationship' with God is still intact! Calvinists (popularly) declare that, although one's fellowship can be broken, one's relationship can never be severed. They (popularly) declare: "Once saved, always saved! Once a son: Always a son!"

No kind or amount of sin can destroy a person's relationship with God. They firmly declare that 'nothing can separate us (believers) from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' (Romans 8:37-39) *"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, [neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

One popular text which Calvinists like to quote is John 10:29 Which states that assurance is given that no force or entity can 'snatch' (kidnap) believers away from the protection of the God of love (from the 'Good Shepherd'). *"My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand."*

Again, as is so often the 'case' with Calvinists, the promise is quoted, but the condition is not noted. The sheep have wonderful care and protection, and it is true that no outside force is powerful enough to 'steel away' the sheep from the 'good shepherd'. These are amazing and comforting promises that are given to 'sheep'. But, it is only sheep who can claim the 'promises' of protection.

We must carefully read the scriptures. In this passage, if 'sheep', are guaranteed wonderful protection, one must ask who 'sheep' are according to the scripture. Sheep are those who 'hear' (recognize) the voice of the good shepherd. Sheep are those who obediently follow (obey) the good shepherd! There is no guarantee to anyone who does not listen for and who does not recognize the voice of the good shepherd, and who is not following (obeying) the voice (instruction) of the good shepherd!

A person (believer) who chooses no longer to listen for the voice of the good shepherd (that is, listen through meditation and prayer and the preached Word and the counsel of godly mentors), such a wandering (drifting) person can no longer claim to have the 'right' to the good shepherd's protection. Sheep are those who are seeking earnestly to 'obey' the instructions (will and desires) of the good shepherd.

*WILL THE 'GOOD SHEPHERD' FORCE HIS SHEEP TO REMAIN
IN THE FOLD?*

The wandering (drifting) person - the person who has left the fold of the good shepherd - certainly cannot claim the 'promise' of total protection by the good shepherd from all evil! If one does not meet the 'conditions', he cannot claim the fulfillment of the 'promises'! God is a gracious 'Shepherd', but the 'gracious gifts' (of protection and sustenance) are given only to those who are enjoying a 'love relationship' (an obedient relationship) with the 'Good Shepherd'!

This popular (often quoted) scripture: *"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."* (John 10:27-30) on the lips of Calvinists (which they champion as the 'proof' that a believer cannot be 'snatched' from the 'hands of the Shepherd') does not take into account the 'conditions' within verses 27-28.

These sincere persons (who are committed to the idea of 'once saved, always saved') focus on verse 29 which declares that believ-

ers cannot be 'snatched' from the hand of God! These Calvinist Christians have focused on the 'promise', but they have failed to recognize the 'conditions' (they have failed to identify what constitutes 'sheep' - 'sheep' who alone can claim the 'wonderful promise' of security)!

Their emphasis on the 'security of the believer' is good and it is biblically supportable. But, again, who is a believer (a sheep)? Only those who listen for and who hear the voice of the good shepherd, and who decidedly follow (obey) the good shepherd! To these persons (close followers of the good shepherd - Christ), there is, indeed, wonderful provision, wonderful protection, wonderful 'eternal security'!

However, if a one-time believer (sheep) chooses to leave the flock, refuses no longer to listen for and to hear and to heed the voice of the shepherd (the blessed Holy Spirit), and chooses to obey the voices of the world rather than the loving voice of the good shepherd (the blessed Holy Spirit), then such a one-time believer has invited disaster into his life! Such a person, thereby, has severed his relationship with the good shepherd!

WILL A 'SEVERED BRANCH' EVENTUALLY DIE AND BE CAST ASUNDER AS USELESS?

Just as there is no life in the branch that severs itself from the life-giving vine (and, thereby, the branch surely will die), so the sheep that no longer listens to the voice of the good shepherd and no longer obediently follows the good shepherd, that sheep forfeits its 'right' to be a 'sheep'. A sheep is only a sheep as long as it has intimate and loving and obedient relationship with the good shepherd!

Likewise, a branch is only a branch as long as it is vitally attached to the life-imparting vine! The analogies of the sheep and the vine (both of which, of course, represents Christ or the Spirit) teach us that, as long as there is a vital relationship with the Spirit, there is the life of the Spirit within a person.

When that vital and life-giving 'attachment' (to the Vine and to the Shepherd) ceases, then there is no longer spiritual life within the person (the one-time believer)! No abiding in the vine, then no life in the

branch. No abiding in loving relationship with the good shepherd, then no more existence as a sheep! 'Eternal life' - yes! But it is 'conditional life' - all conditioned upon the meeting of God's clearly prescribed requirements!

God respects the operation of the human 'free will', not only when the sinner comes to Christ in repentance and faith, but also when the believer establishes a relationship with God! Good analogies - our relationship with God is like a sheep that has a relationship with a shepherd, and like a branch that has a relationship with the vine.

The vine never 'forces' a branch to remain attached to the vine, and the good shepherd never 'forces' a sheep to remain in relationship with the good shepherd and his flock! God has a profound respect for the exercise of human 'free will'. After all, we are made in the image of God, and one of the 'chief characteristics' of human beings is 'free will'!

God never treats us like puppets on a string (puppets which He controls according to His own whims). We are not 'robots' which God loves to play with, 'robots' which He likes to control according to His own desire! We are created with the awesome capacity to say 'no' as well as to say 'yes' to the good will of our Creator!

OUR PERSONAL DECISIONS MAKE A DIFFERENCE - POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE RESULTS!

We all reap positive results for right decisions, or negative consequences for wrong decisions! Our initial choice lies in our 'lap', but the positive results or the negative consequences from our initial choice are not ours to choose. In a moral universe (where choices make a difference) we don't determine the kind or the degree of either our positive results or of our negative consequences! That 'outcome' lies in the hands of our Creator/God!

Let this truth be reiterated, the outcome (positive or negative) of our choices is determined by the 'Governor of the Universe' (Almighty God). He alone decides on the severity of our punishment (for wrongdoing) or the lavishness of our rewards (for right doing)! God alone

knows the mind and the intent of every person's life and God is both merciful and just in His basic character. The initial choice belongs to us (as 'free will' moral agents), but the outcome of our choice does not belong to us! The outcome, instead, belongs to the all-merciful and to the all-just God whose knowledge of us is 'perfect' and who will judge each of us with total equity! God alone knows the thoughts and motives and intentions and desires of every person, and He alone can justly distribute the rewards and the punishments that are properly due to each person!

This expanded discussion is all based on the premise (biblical revelation) that every man has a frightening and yet a wonderful capacity called 'free will'! The premise of Calvinism is that man does not actually possess an authentic and a genuine and a significant 'free will', but that God, instead, decides everything, without exception!

*WHICH IS IT - CALVINISTIC 'DETERMINISM' OR
'FREE WILL' CHOICE?*

Calvinistic 'determinism' is a repudiation of the biblical revelation of the nature of God's creation of Man in His own image (that is, God created Man with the capacity to choose right from wrong, a capacity that was from the beginning exercised wrongly - by our first parents). Ever since that 'historic fall', man (tragically) has often chosen wrongly. Sin is widespread on the earth, and it was (of course) because of the sin-wrecked world that God became a Man - to save a sinful race!

Among the several tragic beliefs of Calvinism, is the belief that God (as sovereign) has total control, and that, consequently, man has no ability to honestly exercise his independent 'free will'! The idea of 'choice' is dominant throughout the entire Bible. God takes man's (authentic, independent) choices very seriously, for man's choices not only determine the immediate quality of his life, but man's choices ultimately determine his eternal destiny!

Strong is the debate between Christians who, on one hand, believe that it is impossible to lose one's salvation, and, on the other hand, Christians who believe that 'eternal life' is 'conditional' rather than 'unconditional'! Those who believe in 'unconditional eternal security'

(that is, 'once saved, always saved') contend that, to believe otherwise, is to be unbiblical and almost 'heretical'!

Those who believe in 'unconditional eternal security' strongly accuse those who believe in 'conditional eternal security' as being unbiblical and untrue to the 'promises of God's Word'! They accuse such persons as those who fail to believe in the Biblical promises, as persons who disbelieve the 'keeping power' of God, and those who discredit the 'grace' of God!

*CAN YOU PRACTICE 'SINNING' AND, AT THE SAME TIME,
CONTINUE TO BE 'SAVED'?*

When these dogmatic Christians are asked about those one-time-Christians who are presently 'living in sin', these Calvinistically-minded believers usually have two 'pat answers'. They say, about these persons who were one time professed 'Christians', but who presently are living in 'deep sin', that these persons were 'never saved to begin with'. They only thought they were believers, but they really weren't saved. They had a profession of faith, but they had no true possession of faith.

Or, the more frequent response is: These one-time-believers have presently 'lost their fellowship' with God, but if they were 'true Christians' at one time, they will inevitably 'come back to fellowship' with God. Inevitably these who are presently away from God (in sin) will come back to God. They will eventually repent of their wayward ways! These Calvinistically-oriented persons popularly declare: Once saved, always saved, regardless of the present sinful condition of a believer who is presently away from the fellowship of God.

If they were once saved, that 'relationship' of salvation can never be 'lost'! "Once a son: Always a son". God would never abandon His children, even if they are presently living 'like the devil!' One's fellowship can be lost (temporarily, because of disobedience), but one's relationship (as a son of God) can never be lost.

Even if such a person dies while he is practicing a life of sin, he will, nevertheless, go to heaven, for if he was once saved, he is saved forever. If he was once a 'son' of God, he is forever a 'son' of God, even

if he happens presently to be a 'disobedient son' (a prodigal son). God, as Father, can never abandon His children. He, obviously, is grieved when His children stray away, when they sin, when they are not in 'fellowship' with Him, but, when once a person possesses 'eternal life' (received at conversion) even a wandering (sinning) son of the Father cannot be ultimately 'lost' (and miss heaven)! Thus are the declarations of Calvinists!

According to Calvinists, when one becomes a true Christian, his relationship was sealed with God, and there is no doubt that eventually heaven will be his home. He can't lose his salvation (his eternal life)! To even suggest that a believer could be 'lost' and eventually go to hell, is a form of blasphemy, a denial of God's promises, a questioning of God's faithfulness and integrity!

The above arguments (Calvinistic reasoning) are held by many persons (believers), some of whom would not consider themselves as 'Five Point Calvinists'. Whether or not one is a 'hard-core' Calvinist or a milder type of Calvinist, all Calvinists strongly believe in 'once-saved-always-saved' ('perseverance of the saints' is the more theological phrase).

On the other hand, those who believe in 'conditional eternal security' point to the fact that the Bible often 'couches' the promises of the Bible within the broader 'context' of 'conditions' and 'warnings'. In other words, God does not offer promises without conditions to be met and without warnings to be heeded!

Great are the promises of God to 'keep' a believer, and to assure a believer a place ultimately in heaven, if he will obediently follow God, and IF he will keep himself from falling into a lifestyle of sinning. The Bible speaks forthrightly about the possibility (not probability) of 'falling away from grace' (from a life of obedience and faith).

CAN THE BELIEVER WHO DEPARTS FROM GOD, BE RESTORED AND HEALED?

Of course, the believer who backslides from the life of faithfulness to God can be restored to a relationship with God, if he repents and if he surrenders to God anew. But, it is possible for a wandering one-time-believer to continue to wander in a life of sin, and never to re-

turn to 'faith in Christ'. In that horrible 'event', that one-time-branch (John 15), severed from the vine because of a practice of sinning, becomes a 'dead branch', ready to be severed altogether from the vine, and ultimately to be destroyed ('burned')!

John Calvin, of course, believed that it was impossible for a true believer to become an apostate - one who is severed from the vine as a result of continuous sinning. He believed that the 'elect ones' would have no 'say' as to whether or not they remained a member of the 'elect family'. If you are a 'branch', attached to the vine, you are forever a branch, and there is no possibility of your being severed from the vine!

If God elected someone to go to heaven, then nothing and no one could sever such a person from the 'vine' (John 15). Inevitably and irrevocably and absolutely and certainly the 'elect one' would remain in the vine! These words describe the 'fortunate' position of the elect ones. This describes the Calvinistic doctrine of 'irresistible grace'!

Calvinists believe that no one or nothing can remove a believer from the hand of God - and that one cannot even remove himself from the hand of God. In other words, after one is converted his own 'will' no longer operates, in terms of the possibility of his removing himself from his relationship with God, through willful disobedience or through sinful actions!

According to Calvinists, there is no way that one can remove himself from the 'hand of God'! God holds His children in the 'hollow of His hand', and no one can be removed from the hand of God! Eternal security with no exceptions! Regardless of how the believer exercises his own human 'free will', he will not be removed from the 'hollow of God's hand'!

Even if a child of God chooses to abandon his faith, and, instead, live a life of sinning, he, nevertheless, remains a child of God; he retains a place in the 'hollow of God's hand'! Why?

Because his 'eternal security' is guaranteed by the Lord of mercy! A wandering Christian, admittedly, is presently out of 'fellowship' with God, but his position as a child of God is not 'in question'. So say the Calvinists!

Regardless of his present (sad) state of living in sin, God has not abandoned this wandering Christian! His relationship as a 'child' of God is intact, undiminished by his present sinful lifestyle. Once a son, always a son - period! 'Eternal life' is just that - 'Eternal'! God's children are 'sealed' in God's elect family for time and for eternity.

*IS THERE ANY 'FORCE' THAT CAN SEPARATE A CHRISTIAN
FROM THE LOVE OF GOD?*

According to Calvinism, there is nothing that can separate a child of God from the secure love of God. (Romans 8:38-39) Such a person (regardless of the kind of sinful behavior he manifests) cannot be removed from the status of the 'chosen ones' ('elect family of God'). Another strong Calvinist declaration! Another Calvinist way of thinking! In Calvinist teaching there is a diminishing (denial) of the exercise of the human 'free will'!

Arminians affirms the fact that the human 'free will' is a capacity (according to the Bible's teachings) that is not paralyzed after one becomes a believer! Just as a human being must exercise his will (positively) when he comes to Christ for salvation (that is, with the aid of prevenient grace, he is enabled to exercise his will to repent and to trust Christ for salvation), I say, just as a person must exercise his free will at that (conversion) time, so a Christian (according to scriptures) must continue to exercise his will (positively) throughout his entire life, to obediently follow Christ as a disciple.

A Christian (at any time) can foolishly choose to love the world rather than to love the Lord. The Bible frequently lays down conditions that must be met, and warnings that must be heeded. If a believer's relationship with God was secured and absolute and unquestioned, then why are Christians exhorted repeatedly to guard themselves against the snares of sin (the traps of the evil one)?

The Bible is full of 'conditional verses' and the 'free will' of the believer is challenged, time after time. The Spirit encourages the believer to take the high road rather than to take the low road, during a time when the believer is tempted to become bitter and to harbor an unforgiving spirit, during a time of persecution and unfair treatment!

The Bible exhorts believers to practice the 'means of grace' (church attendance, prayer, Bible reading, giving). There are numerous 'warnings' addressed to genuine believers. Why would God give these warnings if it were not possible for God's children to do the very things that the warnings are intended for a believer to avoid?

For instance, God warns His children to avoid 'false prophets' and 'erroneous teachings'! Why did God give these warnings? Simply because there was the possibility of wandering into these numerous 'false teachings', like the denial of the incarnation - denial that Jesus was fully human and also fully divine. If that happened, one-time believers would end up becoming apostates (those who fell away from 'grace').

The book of Galatians addresses the 'legalists' - one-time believers who had abandoned the 'way of grace' and who had adopted the 'way of law'! Those 'believers' who had abandoned 'grace' had, by their tragic choice, abandoned their relationship with God (and, thus, they had destroyed all spiritual life within them)!

*THERE IS A LONG 'LITANY' OF SINS WHICH GOD WARNS
BELIEVERS TO AVOID!*

It is (horror of horrors) possible for a one-time believer to abandon his 'faith' (in Christ alone), and to adopt a 'false philosophy' (like legalism or sensualism or hedonism or materialism). It is possible for a believer to be enticed by the worldly ways of living, and to succumb to the thoughts and the ways of worldliness! Wicked ways of living such as love of religious formality and legalistic observations rather than authentic 'religion'; sexual attraction for a woman other than your own wife as a result of pornography; love of pleasure of all kinds more than love of God; craving for money and for material things that replaces your supreme love of God!

Among the various scriptures which teach that it is possible for a believer to reject his 'faith' and to become an apostate is Ezekiel 33: 10-20. This scripture reveals that there can be a 'reversal' (either way). A believer can become an apostate, and, on the other hand, an unbeliever can become a follower of God. I suggest you and I give serious contemplation to the following vivid insight into two opposite

human responses to God.

"Son of man, say to the Israelites, 'this is what you are saying: "Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?" Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?' "Therefore, son of man, say to your people, 'If someone who is righteous disobeys, that person's former righteousness will count for nothing. And if someone who is wicked repents, that person's former wickedness will not bring condemnation. The righteous person who sins will not be allowed to live even though they were formerly righteous. If I tell a righteous person that they will surely live, but then they trust in their righteousness and do evil, none of the righteous things that person has done will be remembered; they will die for the evil they have done. And if I say to a wicked person, 'You will surely die,' but they then turn away from their sin and do what is just and right - if they give back what they took in pledge for a loan, return what they have stolen, follow the decrees that give life, and do no evil - that person will surely live; they will not die. None of the sins that person has committed will be remembered against them. They have done what is just and right; they will surely live. "Yet your people say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' But it is their way that is not just. If a righteous person turns from their righteousness and does evil, they will die for it. And if a wicked person turns away from their wickedness and does what is just and right, they will live by doing so. Yet you Israelites say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' But I will judge each of you according to your own ways." (Ezekiel 33:10-20)

Ezekiel 18:21-32 gives further understanding of the possibility of the recovery of the wicked person to righteousness and the possibility of the righteous person becoming a wicked person. *"But if a wicked person turns away from all the sins they have committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, that person will surely live; they will not die."²² None of the offenses they have committed will be remembered against them. Because of the righteous things they have done, they will live. Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not*

pleased when they turn from their ways and live? "But if a righteous person turns from their righteousness and commits sin and does the same detestable things the wicked person does, will they live? None of the righteous things that person has done will be remembered. Because of the unfaithfulness they are guilty of and because of the sins they have committed, they will die. "Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' Hear, you Israelites: Is my way unjust? Is it not your ways that are unjust? If a righteous person turns from their righteousness and commits sin, they will die for it; because of the sin they have committed they will die. But if a wicked person turns away from the wickedness they have committed and does what is just and right, they will save their life. Because they consider all the offenses they have committed and turn away from them, that person will surely live; they will not die. Yet the Israelites say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' Are my ways unjust, people of Israel? Is it not your ways that are unjust? "Therefore, you Israelites, I will judge each of you according to your own ways, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, people of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone; declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!"

Believers are commanded to love God supremely and to love their neighbors sincerely and authentically. How easy it is for a believer's loyalties to become hurtfully attached to someone or to something other than to the 'Lover of man's soul'. It is too easy for a believer, surrounded as he is with thousands of worldly attractions and gadgets and entertainments, to become enamored (caught) by the world. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world", whether it is sexual enticements, whether it is materialistic enticements, whether it is secular enticements (pride and self enhancement)!

As believers, we are warned against 'losing our first love' for God. We are warned against losing the 'fire and enthusiasm and zeal' for the important matters of the Kingdom of God! A most frightening warning is found in Revelations 3:15, 16! Says the Lord, "*I know you well - you are neither hot nor cold; I wish you were one of the other! But since you are merely lukewarm, I will spit you out of my mouth!*" (Living

Bible)

Even though the Calvinist Christians deny the possibility of a genuine believer ever being able to 'fall away from grace' and ultimately to be lost eternally, the Bible indicates strongly (time after time) that, indeed, it is possible for a believer to leave his 'first love' (his love for Christ), to become 'lukewarm' (casual, indifferent, and uninvolved, in the ways and in the work of God's Kingdom), to become ensnared by sin of various sorts, to neglect his church meetings (Hebrews 10), to become engulfed by sexual lust through the internet, to become a lover of money rather than a lover of God, to become engrossed with intellectual pursuits and, consequently, to neglect the Word of God, to abandon the holy practices of meditation and of prayer, to become lukewarm regarding fellowship with God and with fellowship with fellow believers.

The wandering mind and the lukewarm heart and the inactive (lazy) hand are a combination that spells spiritual disaster and eventual spiritual destruction! And the three (just stated) 'conditions' (states of spiritual malady) can happen to any Christian - even to you and to me! The Bible exhorts us to guard ourselves against so many 'spiritual enemies' (like jealousy, envy, bitterness, lust, greed, lying, hatred, and an unforgiving spirit).

If it was impossible for believers to 'fall into these many spiritual traps', why would the Bible warn believers to guard themselves against these 'traps'? I am quite sure that Calvinists would agree that it is possible for genuine believers to 'fall' into these horrible 'traps', but, I suppose that Calvinists would (foolishly) go on to declare that, even though believers could indulge themselves in these 'terrible' sins, they, nevertheless, would retain their 'relationship' (of sonship) with the Heavenly Father.

Such believers (the Calvinists would declare) who are living like the 'devil' have only lost their 'fellowship' with God, but not their 'relationship' (status) with God. Calvinists fall back on their well-used phrase - 'once saved, always saved!' regardless of the amount of sinning or the kind of sinning these wandering believers are presently committing!

I heard one Calvinist go so far as to say (in loyalty to his doctrine of 'unconditional eternal security') that there will be some 'children of God' who will be committing adultery when they physically die, but that these adulterous believers will go straight to heaven (for, regardless of the kind or the degree of sinning in the life of a wandering believer, he cannot lose his 'relationship' with God!).

***WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR BELIEVERS TO "KEEP
THEMSELVES IN THE LOVE OF GOD?"***

John Calvin (as taught in modern-day Calvinism) believed that those whom God predestined to be saved (to be members of God's elect group) would be inevitably heavenly citizens, after they physically died. "Once in the family of God", by virtue of God's predestining (perfect and sovereign) will, "always in the family"! Nothing and no one could remove these choice souls from the hand (favor) of Almighty God! Calvinists like to advance their doctrine of unconditional eternal security by quoting certain 'proof texts', notably "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand." John 10:27-29, and the last paragraph of Romans 8 "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Nothing can separate the 'elect ones' from the love and the protection of God!

This 'iron-cast logic' (the fifth point in the Five Point Doctrine of Calvinism) is based on the Premise of Calvinism, namely 'Predestination' of God's select (favored) group! If one accepts the premise of 'Predestination', then obviously it is certain (inevitable) that God's elect ones cannot backslide (apostatize) and thus lose their Salvation and ultimately be eternally lost! Remember: The Calvinist System is an 'Iron-Cast' Logic! If you accept Point One (Predestination), then the other subsequent four points 'fit into that System' rather neatly! But, if one starts with an erroneous (false) premise, the subsequent points (which

are built on the premise) will likewise be erroneous (false)!

The Bible (fortunately) does not teach that only some are chosen to be saved. What does the Bible teach? The Bible teaches that God loves all, that God chose (before the foundation of the world) a persons to be saved through the instrumentality of Jesus' death and resurrection, that God offers (through the Holy Spirit) the gift of repentance and the gift of saving faith (called prevenient grace), that God (when once a sinner responds positively to God's universal call to salvation) offers daily forgiveness and inward cleansing for the believer's failures, and God (through the Spirit) offers the needed strength to live the Christian life, that God has prepared a special place in heaven for all persons without exception (and God will joyfully receive every person into heaven who has faithfully followed the Good Shepherd (Jesus Christ) during his earthly journey.

There is no such reality as God's sovereign decision to select (elect) some persons for eternal life to arbitrarily condemn all other persons to hell! There could be no greater affront to the love and the mercy and the justice of God! A totally unbiblical doctrine – the damning, horrifying doctrine of Calvinistic Predestination!

The Bible teaches that all persons can be saved initially, and that all who are saved initially can stay saved – but not automatically! No believer is saved unconditionally! God can keep every believer, free from a life style of sinning, but a believer must continue to follow the Shepherd (Jesus)! It is not 'once saved, always saved'. Believers must obey, must persevere in the Faith!

One of the great (most incisive and enlightening) Biblical expositors (of a previous century) was G. Campbell Morgan. Highly respected for his careful treatment of Scriptures, this 'Prince of The Expositors' examines countless scriptural passages. Among his numerous messages (delivered to his own British Congregation) is one message (an exposition of the small book of Jude) entitled "Keep Yourselves in The Love of God", (a quotation from that Scriptural passage). He notes that, although the 'Keeping Power' of God is great, the 'grace of God that sustains a believer' must be appropriated, in order to avoid falling away from God's wonderful new life. Many pitfalls are to be avoided! The love of God is freely offered (available without favoritism), never-

theless, believers must, throughout their earthly pilgrimage, keep themselves in the 'Love of God'! In other words, there is no automatic Salvation, no automatic quarantine entrance into heaven! Believers must appropriate the abundant spiritual resources, and believers must determine to avoid worldliness (attractions and allurements) and they must set their mind on Christ and His Way and His Word and His Will!

Carefully examine and meditate upon a few words of exhortation from the pen of this highly-respected Biblical expositor (G. Campbell Morgan):

Being in the love of God; keep yourselves from all that which is unlike Him; from all that which violates love and grieves the heart of God; or to use the actual word of Paul that which causes sorrow to the Spirit of God. Being in His love do not become careless, but remember that you are responsible. The atmosphere in which you dwell creates responsibility. The great and gracious fact of the unsought, unconditional, love of God, into which you have been specially brought as you have been called, creates grave responsibility. We are surrounded by seductive influences. We are in the love of God; and yet we live in an atmosphere in which, unless we learn the art of watchfulness, unless we discover our responsibility, and answer it in the economy of God, we shall wander, not away from His love, for He will still love, but from the possibility of realization and manifestation; we shall fail to fulfill its purpose, and to answer its great and gracious impulse.

Our age-abiding and ultimate safety depends upon our correspondence to God. We are not to think our salvation is the result of grace, independently of our response thereto. Christ will not introduce us into heaven's fellowship unless there be correspondence to God. Unless there be that love of God shed abroad in our hearts, mastering the life which expresses itself in holiness, compassion, and sacrificial service, He will never present us before the throne of God. There is a grave and awful responsibility resting upon us. Let us remember it.

Privilege is not enough. It creates responsibility; and responsibility not responded to, unanswered, not yielded to, issues in de-

struction. "Keep yourselves in the love of God." It is necessary that over and over again those of us who name His name should bring ourselves back to the measurement of His requirements, and test ourselves as by His love. If the word of the living God is searching and trying you, do not forget that He loves you still. You are in His love; answer it, respond to it, yield to it. All that in you is contrary to that love; all of bitterness, of hatred, of injustice, of impurity, all that violates the perfect law of the universe which is love; all these things are to be put away. So we are to keep ourselves in the love of God, responding to it, allowing it to be the perpetual test of our thinking, the criterion of our conduct. We are responsible in these matters.

Portions of Chapter 19 of Volume 4 of the Westminster Pulpit,
by G. Campbell Morgan.

The Bible exhorts (commands) believers "to work out their salvation with fear_and include trembling." With the abundance of promises in the Bible, there are also many conditions to be met, and many warnings to be heeded. The Spirit's intention is to take every soul to heaven, but He can only do so if humans (with a free will) choose to accept the Christ and choose to obey the directions of the Holy Spirit! Numerous times the Bible urges (commands) believers to wash their hands of all evil things and all evil attitudes, and to purify their hearts of all pollution (ulterior motives). The Bible teaches that sanctification (cleansing) is both the work of the Spirit, and the discipline of the believer!

*DID JESUS COME TO SAVE US 'IN' OUR SINS, OR TO SAVE
US 'FROM' OUR SINS?*

In other words, according to Calvinists, you can be a 'sinning Christian' - which, according to the Bible, is a contradiction in terms! Perhaps it needs to be stated again, *"He who lives a righteous life is a righteous person, and he is up to-date in his relationship with God!"* On the other hand, he who practices sin is not righteous and he is not a follower of God and he is not going to heaven when he dies (unless he deeply repents of his sins and unless he returns in truth to a surrendered relationship to Christ). *"The person who has been born into God's family does not make a practice of sinning, because now God's*

life is in him; so he can't keep on sinning, for this new life has been born into him and controls him - he has been born again." (I John 3:9) (Living Bible)

With all the 'pitfalls' of sin that surround a believer, is it any wonder that the Lord sounds forth multiple "warnings" for believers that must be heeded? The Bible makes it clear that, although the power of the Spirit is available to reinforce a believer against all sorts of sin, there is the possibility (not the probability) that a Christian can backslide (leave the path of righteousness and step on to the path of sin).

Horror of all horrors, a Christian can even go beyond a state of backsliding and become an apostate (one who embraces wickedness in a very full measure) (see II Peter 2). Arminians, like Calvinists, believe that when a believer sins, this believer (at least temporarily) loses his 'fellowship' with God. Arminians do not believe that if (or when) a believer sins, he is quickly 'dropped like a piece of hot coal' by God!

God is merciful and He (the Spirit) immediately seeks the wayward believer, and the Spirit seeks to immediately restore the erring Christian. The Spirit points the sinning believer to the Advocate (Jesus Christ the Righteous One - I John 2), and the Spirit encourages the wandering believer to 'plead the blood of Jesus' for the forgiveness of his sin, and for the cleansing of his polluted heart!

As stated previously, Arminians embrace the teachings of the New Testament which teaching emphasizes the importance of getting back to the arms of the good shepherd, to get back into the fellowship of the loving sheep fold (church). Christians who are seeking to walk obediently, and also wandering Christians need to embrace God's warnings (for obedient Christians to continue to avoid the pitfalls of sin, and, if a believer has temporarily fallen into one of the pitfalls of sin, for that wandering believer to leave the pitfalls of sin quickly)!

In either 'set of circumstances' (an obedient believer or a disobedient believer), the numerous warnings of God's Word must be taken most seriously! They are not 'idle' or 'theoretical' warnings! "When ye think (confidently) that ye are standing, take heed lest ye fall!" (So

warns the Word of God)!

The frightening point is this: In spite of the Calvinist's declaration of 'once saved, always saved', the numerous scriptural references (in the New Testament) do not 'back' this doctrine. There is great security in Christ, but only 'in Christ'. Outside of a vital relationship (of obedience) with Christ, there is no 'security'. Calvinists declare a 'security' that is not 'backed' by scripture. It is a 'false' (unfounded) security. They base their doctrine on a few 'proof texts' (like Romans 8:38, 39 and like John 10:27-30).

Calvinists often quote the famous scripture in Romans 8:38-39, as proof that nothing can separate a believer from the love of God, but these wonderful promises apply only to a believer who is Spirit-led, Spirit-oriented (as indicated by the detailed analysis of the lengthy teaching of the entire 8th Chapter of Romans). The last paragraph is a summary of the teaching of the entire chapter.

However, there are numerous scriptures (many of which I have listed in my booklet entitled 'Does the New Testament Teach Conditional Eternal Security?') that are 'conditional scriptures'. God profoundly respects the human 'free will', and that 'will' must be exercised as long as we humans have a sound mind and a moral consciousness.

Of course, there are 'disadvantaged humans' who have little or no ability to make 'moral decisions', and (because of God's grace and mercy and compassion), these disabled (mentally challenged) persons will definitely go to heaven when they die. The blood of Jesus atones for these precious (mentally disabled) persons. When these God - created (mentally disabled) persons breathe their first breaths in the celestial air of heaven, they will also receive God's gift of new life - including God's gift of their renewed mind! At that time these precious ones (who were trapped in their disabled body on earth) will be released to enjoy their heavenly body!

Yes, it is true that some earthly citizens do not have the capacity to exercise their God - given 'will', but their number, comparatively speaking, is very few. The rest of us humans who have been endowed with a sound mind and with a moral consciousness are intended by God's help to daily choose the right and to eschew the wrong, to

choose to obey the voice of the good shepherd and to drown out the alien voices of the evil world around us.

DOES GOD EXPECT A BELIEVER TO POSITIVELY EXERCISE HIS WILL, ALL OF HIS LIFE?

When we became Christians, through the exercise of our human will (with the enabling of prevenient grace), God respected our 'free will choice' to become a Christian. God took us 'at our word'. We said what God meant, and we meant what we said. God has a profound respect for the exercise of the 'human will'!

God does not abuse our personhood, and the distinctive feature of our personhood which is our ability to make moral choices. An important truth is this: If God respects our human 'free will' (and the choices we make) at the juncture of our life that we term 'conversion', why would God not also cherish (honor) the remainder of our long life, by allowing us humans (believers) to continue to demonstrate our personhood (basic humanity) by the continuous exercise of the 'chief human property', namely, the expression of human 'free will' choices?

It seems 'odd' that God would honor the exercise of 'free will' at the time of a human's conversion, and then, after that time, declare a believer incapable of making wrong moral choices that have the potential of threatening a believer's vital relationship with God. If it is possible for a sinner to resist the Holy Spirit who is 'drawing' him to the cross of Christ for conversion, surely it is possible (tragically) for a believer to 'resist' the Spirit when the Spirit is seeking to guard a Christian against a strong temptation and an enticement to sin.

The 'will' which is operative (challenged) at the time a sinner is 'weighing his options', as to whether or not he will respond to the Spirit's call to 'repentance', is the same 'human free will' that is operative (challenged) during the 'period of probation' (decision-making) as a person lives his life, from the time of his conversion till the time that he breathes his last breath on earth!

Any time, along life's way, a follower of Christ can tragically and foolishly choose to leave the path of righteousness and choose to take

the path of evil. There are countless sins that are listed in the Bible (such as the list of sins in Ephesians and Colossians) that believers are told to guard against. Hebrews 12 warns believers to guard against bitterness (which can defile not only the bitter one, but also all the persons around him).

Believers are to guard against uncleanness of all sorts, including adultery and fornication and foul speech. On and on and on, the New Testament warns believers against falling into the snares of wickedness. Why would all these warnings be given by the writers of the holy Bible? These warnings are not given to unbelievers, for unbelievers are already indulging in the sins which the Bible warns its readers against!

*WHAT 'FUNCTION' DOES THE SPIRIT HAVE IN A PERSON
LIVING A VICTORIOUS LIFE?*

Unbelievers have no reinforcement from the Holy Spirit to resist the warned - of sins, but believers do have that inner reinforcement against the warned - of sins. These warnings are addressed to believers (followers of Christ)! The warnings are very serious warnings for the simple reason that God knows that it is possible for His followers to indulge themselves in the very sins that believers need to avoid!

Even though believers can (wonderfully) claim the inner reinforcement of the mighty Holy Spirit (the all-important 'aid' against temptation), the follower of Christ, nevertheless, must exercise his own positive will and his own earnest human effort, if he (a believer) is to experience victory' over temptation, if he is to resist the allurements of the evil world around him!

Just as the 'prevenient grace' of God was necessary as the all-important 'aid' to enable a sinner to come to Christ for conversion, so the daily 'sustaining grace' of God is needed for a believer if he is to experience the life of consistent victory over evil! In finding salvation, there is the combination of God's 'prevenient grace' and the sinner's exercise of his 'free will' in repentance and in trust of Christ. In maintaining salvation, there is the combination of God's

'sustaining grace' ('keeping power') and the believer's exercise of trust and obedience to Christ's way of life!

*WHAT IS YOUR 'REACTION' - 'ONCE SAVED, ALWAYS SAVED'
– EVEN LIVING IN SIN?*

According to the Calvinistic way of thinking (doctrine), the exercise of the 'free will' of the elect ones is not a 'factor' as to whether or not the chosen ones would continue in the 'elect category'. The elect one may not be perfect (he may even commit a number of sins), but his imperfection (i.e., his sinning) does not forfeit his standing with God, does not sever himself from participation in the Vine (Christ)!

Those (Arminians) who reject the above reasoning of Calvinists, believe that there is no such thing as 'inevitable perseverance' (that is, 'automatic steadfastness in the Christian faith'). Just as a sinner must exercise a positive volition to accept Christ (initially), so a Christian believer must continue (for an entire lifetime) to exercise a positive volition (a faith commitment of obedience) to Christ.

A Christian who is 'once saved' is not automatically and inevitably and irrevocably saved for the rest of his 'earthly journey'. God respects the 'power' of the 'free will' decision when a sinner initially comes to Christ for salvation, and, likewise, God respects the 'power' of the 'free will' in choosing or not choosing to follow Christ for the remainder of the believer's life.

The Bible often warns believers against wandering away into sin, drifting away (Hebrews 2) from the 'truth' (beware of false prophets and teachers). There are numerous 'conditional verses' ('if you do not abide in the Vine, you will not have the 'sap' – life - of the Vine, and eventually you will become a 'dead branch' which ultimately will be severed from the Vine and 'burned' - John 15).

The frightful possibility of falling away from grace (falling into legalism is one of those possibilities) is vividly communicated to the readers of the New Testament (note the book of Galatians). The book of Hebrews is full of warnings against falling away from the truth and the life of Christ!

Warnings against sensualism (adultery and fornication) are heralded

forth in some of the scriptures! Sins of many different sorts can take a 'stranglehold' on our life, so believers are exhorted to "come out from among them (sinful associations and sinful activities) and be ye separate. Then (if you are committed to a life of holiness and purity) I (God) will receive you, and ye shall be my sons and my daughters!" "Be ye holy, for the Lord thy God am holy!" (Both outward purity and inward purity)!

The fifth point of Calvinism declares that if you (a believer) are 'once in', you are 'in' for the rest of your life! But, this reasoning (regarding 'eternal security') is hard to understand! According to Calvinism, there is no basis for assurance that you are a member of the 'elect' group (a group that was determined before the foundation of the world, selected by the all-powerful and sovereign God who made the 'cut' (the selection) according to His own mysterious (hidden) will)! So, how can there be assurance of anyone's salvation? How can a person experience 'unconditional eternal security' if he does not know (during his lifetime) if he is an 'elect one'?

*WHY DO YOU THINK THERE ARE SO MANY 'IF'
(CONDITIONAL) VERSES IN THE BIBLE?*

The fifth point of the Arminian system emphasizes the fact that God continues to honor the reality of the human 'free will', for all the days of a believer's life. The Spirit is able to 'keep' a believer (free from sin), but the believer must cooperate with the Spirit (by obeying and believing) during the times of temptation and trials and troubles.

God is available to bless and to strengthen and to encourage and to protect and, yes, also to forgive (when a believer fails and sins)! However, the sanctity of the human 'free will' must be recognized by God at all times in a believer's life!

In spite of the 'proof texts' that Calvinists like to quote to 'prove' that a believer cannot be 'lost' ('cannot lose his salvation'), there are, nevertheless, many 'contingency' verses (verses with 'IF' that spell conditions), and there are also numerous 'warning verses' that must be heeded!

Promises to be claimed, Conditions to be met, Warnings to be heeded - a balanced approach to the study of the Word of God! We must not isolate 'texts' that speak only of the promises of God, and neglect the total context which also speaks of the conditions to be met and the warnings to be heeded!

God's power is able to keep a believer from the stench and the contamination of all sin (sinful attitudes and sinful practices). The Spirit's mighty power, however, must be coupled with my willing obedience, if I am to enjoy victory over sin and enjoy a life of productive service! Christians can only ascend to the holy mountain of the Lord (i.e., to the intimate presence of God) if they have a pure heart and clean hands (that is, if they have moral purity and true intent and holy purpose). (See Psalms 24)

IS THE 'BLOOD OF JESUS' AN ABSOLUTE NECESSITY FOR A PERSON'S FORGIVENESS?

"If we (believers) walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus continuously cleanses us from all unrighteousness!" (1 John 1:7)

To assure our self (as a believer) that we will live an abundant life on earth (of continuous fellowship with our Lord), and a life that prepares itself for life after death, a believer must regularly (even daily) surrender his life to the purposes and to the plans of God, and he must ask for the 'cleansing blood' of Jesus to cleanse him from all unfit things (sins and mistakes) that are displeasing to his Master! "The blood, the blood, is my entire plea, O hallelujah, it cleanses me!" Without the shedding of the blood of Jesus, there is no remission of sins!

Those who believe that there is human salvation, without the shedding of Christ's blood on the Cross, sadly misunderstand the significance of Christ's coming to earth! Christ was born to die - to give His life as a ransom for lost mankind, to die in the place of lost sinners!

If one accepts (at 'word value') the writings of John Calvin (regarding predestination) it would seem that man's salvation (i.e., the salvation of God's 'elect' ones) is based 'solely' on God's (mysterious) choice,

dependent upon no other 'reality' (not even the 'reality' of Christ's blood).

Calvinists declare that they believe in the 'limited atonement' of Jesus (i.e., that Jesus died to save only the 'elect ones'), but when John Calvin declares the 'predestination' of the elect ones, it seems that he is saying that it is this 'election' alone that is the determining means by which God's favorite ones are saved for heaven.

Is the blood of Jesus the means for that favored election, or (in spite of Calvinism's doctrine of the 'limited atonement') are the 'elect ones' saved for eternity (with such determination made by God in eternity, independent of the need for Christ's atoning death)?

What if Jesus had not decided to go to the cross, would God's elect one no longer be 'elect'? Would God's choice of the 'elect ones' been forfeited if Jesus had not died? Was the atoning death of Jesus an absolute necessity in order for God's election of certain persons to be realized? That is a key question!

*DO YOU BELIEVE IN 'LIMITED ATONEMENT' OR IN
'UNLIMITED ATONEMENT'?*

Even if the atonement of Jesus is necessary as the sole 'means' for the final salvation of the 'elect ones', it has to be noted that the Calvinistic view of atonement (that is, that the atonement is 'limited' in scope to apply only to the 'elect ones'), I say, the Calvinistic view of limited atonement is truncated, limited, restrictive, narrow, exclusive, arbitrary, and, thus, unbiblical, and dishonoring to the vast number of human beings!

It is startling to realize that the Calvinistic doctrine declares that Jesus' atoning death was only intended for a very limited number of human beings (that is, only for the elect ones whom God had chosen to enjoy eternal life)! Calvinists repudiate the New Testament teaching regarding the 'universality of the love God' (that is, the teaching that God loves the whole world, and that Jesus died for the whole world, and that the whole world is urged to receive the invitation of new life in Jesus Christ, and that God has prepared a special place in heaven for each and every person).

The precious blood of Jesus was shed for every person, without exception. God has elected to save the whole world, and every person has been granted the gift of repentance and faith (making it possible for every individual to be 'saved').

God is not willing that anyone should perish, but that everyone should come to repentance (and be saved). (2 Peter 3:9) It was for the whole world that God gave His Son to die on the cross, to provide atonement for the sins of everyone! (John 3:16)

It is true that the system of Calvinism (the five points) does have an affirmation of Christ's blood (His atonement) as a part of God's program for human salvation (i.e., for the salvation of the elect group). In the system of Calvinism, there is a statement regarding Christ's atonement (why? I don't know; for God has already selected His 'elect ones').

One of the five points of Calvinism is called 'Limited Atonement'. Logically, if Christ's death is necessary for human salvation, then Christ would only need to die for those who have already been 'chosen' by God (from the foundation of the earth). This simple reasoning is part of the so-called 'iron-cast logic' in the Calvinistic system of thought.

In contrast to Calvinism's (logical) assertion that Jesus died only for the 'elect ones' (limited atonement), the New Testament affirms repeatedly that, because God loves all, because the Holy Spirit convicts all (prevenient grace), therefore, Jesus died for all persons.

The Bible makes it clear that God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (and be saved)! The blood of Jesus was shed for the salvation of every person. Unlimited atonement (New Testament teaching), rather than Limited atonement (Calvinism)!

Every person is a sinner, Jesus died for all sinners, every sinner is savable (capable of being saved), Jesus' blood was shed for the atonement of every sinner (for the forgiveness of every person), the Holy Spirit is able to witness to every repentant person that he/she is a child of God (and that these repentant ones are on their way to heaven). The Holy Spirit is able to constantly apply the 'blood of Je-

sus' to the heart of every believer (to maintain a believer's 'walk with Christ')!

These (above-listed New Testament revelations) are the positive and the joy-giving truths about God and about Jesus Christ and about Man (the 'wonders of grace' in his life)! What a contrast between these life - transforming realities of New Testament declarations, and the death-dealing and dreadful and discouraging and fear-producing concepts of Calvinism (a system that spells injustice)!

Was Christ's earthly life and death essential to make possible God's election of man in Christ? Could not God simply have decreed man's salvation without Jesus dying on the Cross? No! Even though God wanted to save mankind, God could not have saved sinful humanity without the Holiness of God being honored and without the penalty of sin being paid (the penalty of sin being death).

Christ's sacrifice (that is, His shed blood) is the answer to God's holiness being honored, and the justice of God being vindicated! The atoning blood of Jesus was absolutely essential for the salvation of man. In the Bible are found these simple (frank) words: "Without the shedding there is no remission for sins!"

God loved mankind, God elected all of mankind to be His 'own' - before the foundation of the world - but God could only save mankind through the death of Jesus on the Cross. Of course, if Adam and Eve (and the human race that they represented) had not fallen into sin (in the Garden), there would have been no need for the 2nd Person of the Holy Trinity to come to earth, to give His life as a ransom for a fallen race of people! Because of the terrible 'fall', of necessity God had to send His Son to earth to provide a 'ransom' (atonement and a bloody sacrifice) - a means of rescue from hell - for the sinful human race (God-loved persons)!

What God purposed and what He intended in eternity - namely, the choice (or election) of the human race for salvation and sonship - Christ made possible in time through His death on the cross. Without Christ's death on the cross, providing atonement for sin, the intention of God would never have been realized.

There is no way that any man could have been chosen by God for

sonship without the historic work of Christ on the Cross. There is no election (or choice) of man to salvation outside of Christ and His work on the Cross! God's choice of humans for salvation and sonship could only become a reality because of what Christ did on the cross. We are chosen in (or through) the Beloved Christ!

It is important to remember that God could only see His choice (desire and will) to save mankind become a reality because of what Christ did on the Cross. Also, it is important to remember that Christ was not 'forced' by His Heavenly Father to come to this 'sin-cursed world' to rescue mankind.

The angels must have been aghast (totally surprised) when Jesus said He would be willing to leave the comfort (glory) of heaven, to travel to a wretched location in the universe called planet earth (a small and insignificant and sin-filled and ignorant and idolatrous world)!

"Out of the Ivory Palaces into a world of woe! Only His great eternal love made my Savior go!" Jesus did not have to come to this world to rescue a lost race of sinners! Only Christ's love for sinners - sinners such as you and such as I - 'compelled' Him to make the 'huge descent'- to 'step down' from the portals of heaven to a 'small footstool' - to die for us all!

Jesus made it clear that He did not have to die - to die a cruel death for wicked mankind! In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus said, *"Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father and He shall immediately give me more than twelve legions of angels?"* (Matthew 26:54)

What justification is there to spend considerable time analyzing theological matters (doctrines)? Briefly stated, it must be noted that the concept that one has of God determines the kind of viewpoint that one has of all of reality. One determines his/her attitude of life, by the kind of understanding that one has of God!

I have tried to emphasize that to embrace the 'Calvinistic' view of God is to embrace a view that makes God a forbidding and forlorn and fearful and restrictive and unjust and arbitrary and impersonal God.

*DOES ONES HAPPINESS OR UNHAPPINESS DEPEND UPON
ONES KIND OF GOD?*

There is no way that a person can experience happiness and joy and security and contentment and wholesome self-love and deep satisfaction and a restful sense of well-being and 'holy laughter' and goodwill and compassion for others - that is, in brief, there is no way that a person can have a love for God and a love for others and a love for himself - if he seriously embraces a 'God' who meets the description of the 'Calvinistic God'!

There can only be joy and happiness (and laughter) if one bows the knee to a God who is loving and caring and merciful and compassionate and forgiving and reassuring and personable and intimate and understanding and guiding and gentle and joyous and accepting - that is, he can only be truly happy (and enjoy 'holy laughter') if he serves a God who has revealed Himself clearly in the life and the person and the sacrifice and the victory of Jesus Christ of Nazareth!

If one serves a God who has manifested Himself visibly and concretely - i.e., if he serves a God who was earthly (who could be touched and seen and heard, and on whose face tears trickled down his cheeks, and whose mouth was wide open with his hearty laughs) - then there is a magnetic attraction to that type of God!

God become Man (Incarnation)! Not a God who was distant and abstract and unfeeling and invisible, but, instead, a God who was near and dear and touchable and seeable and truly compassionate and forgiving and accepting and totally loving!

Not a God who is selective and arbitrary and unjust and cruel and fear-producing, but a God who is open and transparent and honest and all-accepting and non-discriminating and healing and tender and personable!

The two kinds of God (by way of contrast) have just been described - the forbidding and fearful Calvinistic God, and the embracing and reconciling and just and merciful God who is portrayed in the New Testament!

Embrace the God of the New Testament God (though He knew the

meaning of sorrow) of delight and joy and laughter and good humor and goodwill and 'holy wit' (even a God who enjoys laughing children sitting on his lap)!

Jesus (the invisible God who is visibly manifest in the New Testament) was serious-minded, but He was not forbidding and restrictive and miserable and forlorn! Jesus knew the meaning of sorrow and grief (at the deepest level). He knew physical and mental pain at the deepest level (on the cross). That is, He was a 'man of sorrows and acquainted with grief'. Jesus, nevertheless, was borne along in His earthly life of intense activity by the 'joy of the Lord.' Jesus was 'constitutionally happy'!

Jesus enjoyed attending wedding parties and other parties, and Jesus was so happy that He was (unjustly) accused (by His enemies) of being a 'winebibber' and a 'friend of publicans and sinners'!

Jesus embraced life in every way. Jesus loved the wonders of nature. Many of His parables were based on the glories of nature. Jesus walked from village to village, and it is obvious that Jesus enjoyed the glories (variety) in nature, as He walked the trails with His disciples!

I'm sure that Jesus enjoyed many happy conversations with His disciples, amidst the needed times when He (most of the time) talked heart to heart to His disciples about the upcoming 'storms' of persecution!

***WHY IS JESUS THE TRUE 'SOURCE' OF MANKIND'S
LAUGHTER, JOY, AND WELL-BEING?***

Jesus, who knew why He had come from His Father to this 'rugged' world, not only dwelt upon the heart-breaking 'issues' of the Kingdom of God, but many times He talked about the joy-filled and the victory-giving issues of the Kingdom! The glorious outcome of the present struggles (against evil) captivated the mind and the heart of the Son of God, and the reflected joy of Christ's knowledge of that ultimate victory certainly was felt in the lives of Jesus' disciples, although the deeper nature of Jesus' glorious coming Kingdom was verily understood by Jesus' disciples!

Amidst all the struggles that Jesus went through (from multiple enemies against the light of Christ), Jesus' face shone forth the light and life of eternity! When Jesus sensed the 'smile of God's approval' resting upon Him, it is certain that Jesus' close friends (disciples) felt at times the warm smile of God's approval also resting on them! Even though their emotional nature was not always stable and predictable (amidst the changing and difficult circumstances of their close relationship with Jesus), there doubtless were times (moments) when the disciples wonderfully experienced the 'overflow' of Jesus' joys in their own lives!

Jesus was a very pleasant person to be around, and I am sure that Jesus' very presence brought security and comfort and joy and perhaps (at times) even laughter to the disciples. How could the disciples not laugh at the laughable metaphors that Jesus used in many of His sermons ("ye strain at gnats and yet ye swallow camels!" and other illustrations)?

Jesus was a master teacher, and part of His skills in teaching involved the use of parables and stories and word pictures and metaphors - and sometimes Jesus incorporated bits of humor, to 'drive' his point home to His listeners (some of whom were skeptics and adversaries). There must have been many in Jesus' audiences who burst out in laughter when they heard Jesus speak.

No, I don't think Jesus used humor in excess, for Jesus was not a mere humorist. Jesus spoke about 'life and death' issues, and Jesus never said anything that would divert from His salvation message regarding the Kingdom of God! But the use of humor had its 'place' and Jesus knew when and how to use humor.

Sometimes when a person laughs at himself (when the truth 'hits home'), that person is brought under 'conviction' which can lead him to repentance and faith in Christ! I am sure that Jesus was not a 'jokester' or a 'humorist', but Jesus (at times) did use humor (and stories and parables and metaphors) to better communicate the message of God's Kingdom! Jesus, it is true, was no stranger to sorrow and pain, but it is also true that Jesus was no stranger to good humor and to wit and even to laughter!

Even though Jesus was weighed down with the sorrows of those around Him (which moved Him with great compassion to heal many persons), Jesus had many 'lighter moments' (such as when He talked to and played with the little children whom He deeply loved). There is no doubt that Jesus experienced the 'joys of the Lord' and the 'joys of living' and the times when He loved to have a hearty laugh!

It is this very kind of 'God' that Christianity declares came from heaven to earth, to dwell among men for 33 years! When humans see the eternal God visibly living among the 'sons of men' - living a sacrificial life, dying an atoning death, rising from the dead in total victory, ascending in the clouds with wonderful glory - why wouldn't human beings declare these divinely-wrought miracles of God, performed with Christ's consent, to be the 'basis' of joy that is unspeakable and full of glory?

Why wouldn't every God-created person (sinner that he is) want to run as hard as he can towards Jesus to be enfolded into the 'arms of divine love' - into the arms of the welcoming 'Savior', into the arms of the inviting 'Good Shepherd'?

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ hates sins - sins that have the power to destroy us - but, even though He intensely and justly hates all sin, this one and only God loves every sinner intensely. This God wants to enfold every sinner, to forgive every sinner, to heal and restore every sinner, to transform every sinner, to strengthen every sinner, to empower every sinner for a most productive and creative and satisfying life of service!

***DO YOU SERVE A 'FORBIDDING GOD' OR A 'LAUGHING
AND LOVING GOD'?***

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is not a forbidding and restrictive and angry and discriminatory and terror-producing God! Just the opposite! He is not the kind of God that is portrayed by John Calvin (and unfortunately promoted by his followers)! The kind of God that Jesus demonstrates, while not a sentimental God or a God who is 'light' on sin, is, nevertheless, a God who is full of mercy and com-

passion and overwhelming love.

He is the kind of God who, while He hates sin, nevertheless, loves sinners (sinners of all 'stipe's' and 'colors' and 'conditions' and 'nationalities' and 'degrees' and 'backgrounds' and 'ages'). "Christ receives sinful men, even me with all my sin."

He is the kind of God who receives the young and the old, the ugly and the beautiful, the sophisticated and the common, the educated and the illiterate, the moral and the immoral, the rich and the poor, the high profile and the ignored, the religious and the irreligious, the brilliant and the ignorant, the ten talented and the one talented, the clever and the dull, the influential and the overlooked, the powerful and the weak!

Jesus has no respect of persons! All persons may come to Him, if they simply go through the 'door of repentance and faith'! God has a 'place' for everyone in His vast Kingdom! None are arbitrarily excluded from His Kingdom! God loves all equally, and even those of a 'lowly position' in life need not feel intimidated!

God does not favor anyone arbitrarily (like the God of Calvinism does)! "Come unto me, all ye that are weak and heavy laden, and I (Jesus) will give you rest!" Jesus has paid the price for the ransom of all persons - for the salvation of every person! Jesus' arms are open wide, and He invites every sin-sick soul to come to Him for forgiveness and for healing and for transformation!

Because Jesus has won the victory over sin and Satan (because of the Cross), Jesus now has every 'right' to be the 'laughing Christ' - 'laughing because an entrance (door) into the Kingdom of God has been provided for every man and woman and boy and girl and teenager! None need perish, all can be saved!

*IS YOURS A 'HOLY LAUGHTER' BECAUSE OF YOUR
ANTICIPATION OF HEAVEN?*

A mansion in heaven has been prepared for every living soul! Isn't that fact enough to make Jesus hang back His head and open His

mouth and laugh in such a manner that the echo of that divine laughter can be heard throughout all the corridors of the heavens? Reverberations of that divine laughter of the victorious Christ can be heard throughout God's mighty expanse (perhaps throughout the endless depths of the vast universe)!

'Holy laughter' coming from the lips of Jesus because His tomb lies empty and because Jesus now has taken His place at the right hand of His Father! 'Holy laughter' because the enemy of mankind has been defeated and the victory for mankind has been guaranteed! Satan is now a defeated foe, and his execution date has already been fixed by the victorious Christ!

The most resounding 'laughter' in the universe is the 'laughter' of the Living Christ! If Christ is 'laughing', His followers definitely have a 'right' and a 'reason' to laugh and laugh and laugh! Christians serve a 'laughing' Christ - a Christ who sets the servants of Christ 'laughing'! Our 'laughter' is a reflection of the 'laughter' of the victorious Christ! To be acquainted with these 'realities' is to be acquainted with the 'unmatched' and the life-transforming 'realities' of the entire universe! This knowledge is the source of the 'joy of all joys' - the unmatched joy of God - a portion of which God wills for every person to experience!

When the 'smile of God's approval' rests upon you (because of your personal faith in Christ), then you will have a reason to 'stand on tiptoe with joy'! You have discovered the very essence of true life, the very 'fountain of all joy', and the very purpose for abundant living!

Therefore, assurance that your sins are forgiven, and assurance that your name is written in the book of life - these basic life assurances give you a reason to relax in God's love and to share God's love with others!

In contrast to the forlorn and forbidding and restrictive and fear-producing 'God' of Calvinism, those Christians who embrace the 'God' of the New Testament (the kind of God just described) have reason to 'stand on tiptoe with indescribable joy'! They have reason to share the joy of the Lord with everyone, near and far!

Why spend so much time describing the 'God of Calvinism'? At least

for one good reason: to understand the nature of this 'terror-producing God' and, thus, to totally refute this long-time standing, 'non-Christian' Calvinistic concept of "God"! Further, at the same time, to enable one better to appreciate (by way of contrast) the 'Christian God' (who is clearly described in the writings of the New Testament). Based on this 'justification', we shall spend further time describing (by way of contrast) the 'Calvinistic' God and the New Testament portrait of 'God' (as seen in the 'face' of Jesus Christ).

*YOUR GOD - UNIVERSAL OFFER OF LOVE OR ARBITRARY
CHOICE OF FAVORITISM?*

God is 'for' the human race, not 'against' the human race! In spite of mankind's failures, God loves everyone, and God seeks to save everyone! Even though the justice of God must be vindicated, the mercy of God supersedes the justice of God and, indeed, it is God's mercy that 'controls' God's justice!

God's justice is always 'tempered' by God's mercy! If that were not so, then the entire (guilty) human race would be totally condemned and ultimately destroyed. But the glorious fact is this: God's mercy exists as long as God Himself exists, and, because God is everlasting, this means that God's mercy is from 'everlasting to everlasting'!

God, by nature, is 'Love', and it is likely that the 'chief' characteristic of God's love is 'mercy'! God definitely is a 'just' God, but, there is much comfort that can be derived when we realize that God's mercy always triumphs over God's justice!

If it were not for God's mercy, the entire human race would be consumed by God's wrath! God loves every person, without exception. God is not arbitrary in his selection of human beings! God did not 'will' (before creation) to 'save' certain persons, and then to 'will' to 'condemn' certain other persons to hell! (This arbitrary 'selection' by God is called, by Calvinists, predestination).

God has provided the 'means' (method) by which every person can be 'saved' and, thus, eventually to go to heaven (because of the 'finished work' of Jesus). Calvinism (as a doctrinal system) is probably the most dreadful, drear, depressing, discouraging, forbidding, unjust, and

frightful theological system that can be found within the total 'compass' of Christianity!

How could anyone relax if he thought that someday (beyond his own choice and his own will and his own decision) he might be one of the unfortunate ones (rejected ones) who would not be invited into heaven someday, might not be one of those whom God 'elected' to be saved?

Tension and anxiety and insecurity, beyond description, would be the 'lot' of persons who 'served' the cruel God of Calvinism! There could be no deep and lasting joy, even though, to survive, you would probably involve yourself in some frivolous 'fun' and 'shallow laughter'!

**THE 'KIND OF GOD' YOU SERVE DETERMINES THE QUALITY OF
LIFE YOU WILL LIVE!**

The kind of God whom you 'serve' determines the quality of the life you will live! If you serve a harsh and unfeeling and arbitrary and forbidding and distant and rigid God - a God whose response to mankind is a response of unjust favoritism - you will, at best, live on 'pins and needles' (nervous and scared and insecure)!

At worse (if you serve the God of Calvinism) you will live a life of cynicism and rebellion and hard-heartedness. Most persons, if they really believed that the God of Calvinism was the 'real God in the universe', would choose the latter (understandable) response - outright rebellion!

Sadly, too many persons in our country see God more as a forbidding and harsh and condemning God, than they see Him as a kind and loving and accepting and personable and forgiving and caring God (the true God as He is portrayed in the New Testament).

Do you serve a God of universal love, or a God of arbitrary favoritism? Do you embrace the God of Calvinism (a very unhappy God), or do you embrace the God of the New Testament - (a very joyous God who loves all and who enjoys a hearty laugh with happy souls, including children)?

I don't know how any person (a professing Calvinist) could be

'happy' while he meditates upon the tenets of his twisted view of God! After all, based upon the belief in God's sovereignty (i.e., based upon God's mysterious and unknown 'will' regarding predestination), no human being (however religious and sincere he may be) can have any assurance that he is going to heaven when he dies!

Let me tell you, 'this is not a laughable matter'! Calvinism is probably the saddest and the most tragic doctrinal persuasion that I know of! The God of the New Testament (Jesus Christ) knew the meaning of sorrow, for sure, but victory over Satan is the resounding declaration in the New Testament!

Therefore, the God whom I serve (Jesus Christ) is a victorious God, a happy God, and a laughing God! Jesus was 'constitutionally happy' because He fulfilled the purpose for which He came to earth, because He won the victory over sin and death and hell for every human being - and that includes 'little old me'!

Many persons are living in doubt, and wondering if in the end they will be welcomed into heaven! God alone, through His arbitrary 'selection' (predestination), determines who composes the 'elect' (chosen) group, for an eternity in heaven! What a tragic (Calvinistic) belief! Particular 'election'! How sad, indeed!

It is terrible to live a 'chancy life' - just hoping that the Almighty God has not 'passed over you' in His arbitrary selection of heaven's inhabitants! If this is the picture (the reality) of the 'true God of the universe', then this universe is a 'trashy' (horrible and frightening and unjust) universe, and the God behind it all is a divine being - a cruel monster - one who certainly is to be despised, not worshiped!

In that 'case', human justice far supersedes 'divine justice'! In fact, when all is said and debated regarding this Calvinistic God, no human being can respect this kind of God. If this is the kind of arbitrary and cruel God that is actually controlling the universe, then most persons would choose never to have been born!

HOW TO AVOID LIVING A LIFE OF TERROR, MISERY, DEPRESSION, AND HOPELESSNESS!

To live in the shadow of possible (probable) impending eternal doom (hell - a place that God is pleased to cast you) - would be a form of 'hell on earth'! No joy and no assurance, with a sense that the powerful hand of God will soon cast you into hell - that is a nightmare of all nightmares! That is a horror of all horrors! That possibility (probability) is enough to drive you 'mad', to make you go insane! To serve a God that is repulsive and totally unjust, a God whose standards of justice are far below the basic human standards of justice!

How could anyone even consider serving that kind of God - especially when the God of the New Testament (totally alien to the Calvinistic God) offers joy and peace and forgiveness and assurance of eternal life? Strength for today, and assurance for tomorrow! A loving and accepting and forgiving and companionable and joyous God! That is the God as 'pictured' in the New Testament!

The just-listed characteristics describe the God of the New Testament, in contrast to the God of Calvinism, who is forlorn and forbidding and angry and condemning and arbitrary! Anyone in his 'right mind' would surely desire to serve the 'true and the living God', the God who is perfectly manifest (revealed) through the life and love of Jesus Christ (the Son of God)!

HOW CAN YOU KNOW THAT THE TRUE GOD IS A 'GOD OF LOVE AND COMPASSION'?

Everything Jesus was on earth, God always was in eternity, so if you want to understand the character of the eternal God, simply focus on the earthly life of Jesus Christ! Jesus is God in human form! What Jesus was on earth - tender love and total acceptance of humans (sinners) - God was always eternally! God did not come to earth (in the form of Jesus Christ) to condemn the world, but that the world (of sinners) might be saved and might enjoy abundant life on earth and eternal life in heaven!

The God of the New Testament (as concretely and as physically known in the earthly life of Jesus Christ) is a loving God, just the opposite of the God that is described in the frightful writings of John

Calvin (and as taught by his 'disciples' today)!

The God of Calvinism is a discriminatory God who arbitrarily selects some persons to be saved, and who (gladly) condemns other persons to be lost (in hell)! Calvinism teaches that human beings have no personal choice or determination as to their own eternal destiny (since God's election alone determines each person's eternal destiny)!

Calvinism's arbitrary, cruel 'plan' denies the place and importance of the 'human will', and Calvinism's 'plan', lacking all compassion and love for human beings, 'mirrors' the 'plan' of Satan himself! It has been pointed out (by a leading Arminian scholar) that the only difference between the God of Calvinism and the Devil himself is in 'numbers'. Satan wants every human being to go to 'hell', whereas the Calvinistic 'God' wants most human beings to go to hell!

The Devil is glad when persons end up in hell, and the God of Calvinism is 'honored' (glorified) when the ones who are not elected end up in hell! On the other hand, the Bible notes that God takes no pleasure in the 'death of the wicked'! There is no one who grieves more than the true and living God when a human being ends up in hell.

*IT IS GOD'S ABSOLUTE 'WILL' THAT EVERYONE MAKE
HEAVEN HIS ETERNAL HOME!*

God has a prepared place in heaven for every single human being. God is not willing that anyone should perish but that everyone should repent and be saved! Short of coercion, the Holy Spirit is doing everything in His power to motivate everyone to come to Christ for salvation.

God loves all, Jesus died for all, all are provided with the opportunity to repent and to trust Christ for salvation (because of the 'prevenient grace' that the Spirit offers to everyone). Further, all have the capacity to turn to the 'higher power' (known to most people as the Lord Jesus Christ).

How wide is God's mercy? I believe God's mercy is very 'wide' - wide enough to encompass even the so-called 'heathen' persons in

our world! God, in the end of time, will judge all persons fairly (that is, each person will be judged by God, according to the kind of spiritual light and according to the degree of spiritual light that each person has received). God will not condemn a person because of his 'ignorance' (his lack of knowledge regarding the person and work of Jesus Christ).

When a 'heathen' (a person with little spiritual knowledge) stands before God, Jesus will judge him with great understanding and mercy! If a particular heathen has 'walked in all the diminished light' that he had the opportunity to experience (the light of nature and the light of conscience and the light of pagan religions, etc.), then, God in love will gladly receive that heathen into His heavenly kingdom! In heaven, he will learn about Jesus Christ!

In heaven, that heathen will understand (for the first time) the true significance of the name of Jesus, and he will rejoice that it was Jesus alone (Jesus' blood) that gave him entrance into heaven. That 'converted heathen' will spend all eternity learning about the majesty of Jesus (His life and works), and that newly revealed knowledge will cause him to bow his knee in worship of Jesus and to raise his hands in joyful praise for the One whom he unfortunately did not have the privilege of knowing on planet earth!

Calvinism does not embrace the 'universal love' of God. The doctrine of 'predestination' is a direct and blatant denial of God's universal love. Calvinism pictures God as One who hates most of the human race, who denies that the human being has the capacity (power) to choose his own eternal destiny, who (horror of horrors) actually takes delight when a large portion of the human race goes to hell! God, according to Calvinism, is glorified when the reprobates (those not selected) are punished in hell!

Let it be repeated: the kind of 'God' who glories in the destruction of a human being (in eternal hell) is the kind of 'God' who could be the 'brother' of Satan himself! Just as Satan glories (rejoices) when a man goes to 'hell', so the God of Calvinism also glories when a man (reprobate) goes to hell! I can only say (as many others would likewise say) that the 'God' of Calvinism should be repudiated (rejected and abandoned) by every 'sane-minded' person!

I have a hard time imagining that any sincere person (Christian or otherwise) would give any credence (attention and loyalty) to such a loveless (indeed, hateful) 'God' - the 'God' of Calvinism! It is my belief that there are many 'followers' of John Calvin (and the system of Calvinism) who have no true awareness of the 'terror' and the 'tragedy' of the teaching of this man (John Calvin), or of the implications and applications of the Calvinistic system (doctrine).

Even though there probably are some 'sound' teachings in the writings of John Calvin, the fact that the basic premise of Calvinism - Predestination - controls all of the other 'points' in the 'iron-caste system' of Calvinism, should be reason enough to abandon (reject) the entire Calvinistic system.

In contrast, in my careful investigation of the Arminian system, I find that the Five Points of this system simply and wonderfully reflect the basic teachings of the New Testament - regarding the doctrines of God, Man, Sin, Jesus Christ, Salvation, and Personal Assurance. Both the 'grace' of God and the 'free will' of Man are presented in a most 'balanced' manner!

The proper relationship between man and God is carefully and biblically maintained in the Five Points of the Arminian system! Jacob Arminius, who originally was a Calvinist, through his diligent study of the scriptures, forsook and abandoned Calvinism. Each of the five points of Calvinism was repudiated, and these Points of Calvinism were replaced by Arminius' Five 'Points' (biblically-founded' Points)!

***JESUS' DISPLAYED EARTHLY PERSON IDENTICAL TO
GOD'S ETERNAL CHARACTER!***

Because Jesus was the epitome of love (without alloy), this means that the eternal God is the epitome (essence) of divine love. All of God's actions are the actions of holy love. Therefore, to characterize God as a wrathful and vindictive and arbitrary God who predestinates some souls to hell (based on His 'hidden purposes') is to picture a God who is totally contrary to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

What Jesus did on earth (love everyone and seek the salvation of

everyone - like a 'seeking shepherd' and a 'caring father' for the prodigal son) is the visible revelation of the heart of the eternal Heavenly Father! The universal love of the Son of God (living a sacrificial life and dying an atoning death in the place of all sinners) - these loving acts are the outward and visible acts of the eternal and invisible God!

God has always been a God of love, and that love was visibly demonstrated on Jesus' Cross! In contrast to the 'God' of Calvinism (who supposedly devised a 'plan' before the world's foundation to save some humans and to condemn other humans, according to His mysterious and hidden purposes), I say, in contrast to the Calvinist 'God', the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ also had a plan - to cherish the entire human race as His sons and daughters - a very loving plan with no discrimination of any human beings!

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is 'perfect love'! Unlike the 'God' of Calvinism (who hates at least a portion of the human race, whom He has condemned even before the rejected ones come into the world), the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ loves every person and has chosen every person to be a child of God, through the loving sacrifice of Jesus! "For God so loved the world that God gave His only Son" as a sacrifice for a lost world!

Unlike the Calvinistic 'God', the God (as pictured in the New Testament) loves every person (sinner) without discrimination, without favoritism, without wavering, without diminishing! Repeatedly, in one chapter of the Bible alone (1 John 4), the love of God is announced! "God Is Love" is the central message of Christianity! The 'God' of Christianity (portrayed in the New Testament) is eternal in His love.

Whatever God does, He does with the sole motivation of divine love! Even God's judgments are motivated by Love! What a stark contrast to the 'God' of Calvinism - a 'God' that is better known for His wrath and judgment and favoritism and injustice and terror and outright hatred and cruelty! The 'God' of Calvinism, frankly and sadly, is more like the Devil himself than He is to the God who is clearly revealed in the New Testament (the God of Love)!

Jesus revealed the character of the eternal God, for Jesus was 'God

in human form! The character of Jesus is identical to the character of God Himself. No contradiction in character (intent and deed) between the Son and the Heavenly Father! The love that Jesus demonstrated in His life and in His death is the identical love which was in the heart of God, for all eternity!

Therefore, to declare (as the Calvinists declare) that the eternal God is different in character than the character that Jesus openly demonstrated is to do great disservice to both Jesus and to the Heavenly Father.

Anyone who sincerely studies (or simply scans) the New Testament knows that the portrait of Jesus is the portrait of perfect and sacrificial and universal love! All that Jesus said and did was motivated by unselfish love - love for everyone (including His enemies)!

His love was a 'forgiving love' ("Father, forgive them - His enemies - for they do not know what they are doing!" - words from the Son as He was in great agony on the Cross)! Jesus never spoke one word that was loveless, and every one of his acts of healing were acts of love!

The Calvinist portrait of God is a portrait that is 'painted' with the dark and drab colors of 'anger', just the opposite of the New Testament portrait of God which is 'painted' by Jesus Himself, painted with the bright and warm colors of love and kindness and compassion and acceptance and mercy and grace and joy and hope and fellowship!

The portrait of the true God - the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ - is a portrait that incites gratitude and thanksgiving and humility and praise and glad surrender and rejoicing and open confession of sin and prayerful communion! And even a 'holy laughter' because of the victory that belongs to the Heavenly Father, because of the 'finished work' of Christ on the Cross!

The portrait of the Calvinistic God brings just the opposite responses - fear and insecurity and confusion and anger because of the injustice of the arbitrary actions of a merciless 'God' - a God whose 'hidden purposes' may result in one's final damnation (regardless of one's personal choice and actions)! No personal security, all because of the

arbitrary actions of a loveless God! No laughter, only insecurity and terror and misery! What a 'horrible God'!

Why would not every person on earth run into the arms of love - unconditional love of Jesus! Personal and personable love! Love that fills the heart and the mind and the spirit and the body! Love that removes all sin and love that replaces the sin with the dignity of being a child of God! Jesus' love that prepares a special place for every human being in heaven! A love that enables and that strengthens the humble person as he travels to that heavenly mansion above!

There cannot be a more 'cruel' theology, and there cannot be a theology which is more counter (opposite) to the picture that is given of the Lord Jesus Christ - His universal love and His desire that all persons repent and believe and make heaven their final home!

The Calvinistic system is, frankly, an enemy of Christianity! Christianity (New Testament) asserts that God loves all persons, asserts that God (before the foundation of the world) chose to save all persons (through the instrumentality of Jesus' death and resurrection), asserts that the Spirit awakens all sinners to their need for salvation and who convicts all of their sins, asserts that the Spirit witnesses with the repentant person that he is, indeed, a child of God and that heaven awaits for his eventual arrival, asserts that the Spirit develops the nine fold fruits of Christlikeness gradually within the heart of every believer.

All of these positive affirmations (declarations of truth) should make us all 'stand on tiptoe with joy!' We ought to experience the highest form of all laughter - the holy laughter of thanksgiving and joy!

***CHRIST BRINGS PEACE AND JOY AND SECURITY AND LOVE
AND HOPE TO HUMANS!***

As a result of the work of the Spirit within the obedient believer, there are amazing and continuing results in the lives of these Spirit-directed believers! "Joy that is unspeakable and full of glory!"

"Peace of God within that keeps the heart and the mind of the believer stable amidst the many changes and the chances of life." "The love of God that is shed abroad in the heart of the believer - a super-

natural love that enables the believer to love God supremely, and to love others sincerely, and to love one's self wholesomely and unself-consciously!

The way of Calvinism is the way of insecurity and unhappiness and self-preoccupation (because of uncertainty regarding one's eternal destiny)! To weigh a person down with the very heavy 'baggage of Calvinism' is to weigh a person down with an unbearable load (and to do this is the epitome of 'cruelty')!

To tell a person (a new believer who thought he was 'saved') that he actually has no 'basis' (because of God's mysterious purposes) to 'claim' assurance of his salvation, is to place on his 'back' a 'manmade bag' which is 'full of cruel teachings' - teachings that are totally 'alien' to the teachings (assurances) of the New Testament!

The convoluted and strange and contradictory and harsh teachings of Calvinism are, in spite of the sincere advocates of this teaching, like 'poison' to the spirit! Not only should newborn believers stay far away from these hurtful teachings, but the same must be said regarding any other believer.

Because these teaching are contradictory to the teachings of the New Testament (which teaches the universal love of God), these teachings should be repudiated by all sincere believers! These teachings are a detriment to evangelism of the lost ones.

Why evangelize the lost ones if God (in eternity before the foundation of the world) already 'chose' whom He wants in His eternal kingdom? And, if there is any evangelism done by Calvinists, in all honesty, the new converts have to be told that, in spite of their confession of sin, there is no assurance that heaven will be their ultimate home.

In other words, the sinner's prayer ultimately means nothing, for God has already chosen the 'elect'! The new believer must realize that, regardless of his honest and sincere confession of his sins to Christ, the Savior-God, the Sovereign One will 'pick and choose' according to His own 'will' as to the persons who will compose His eternal family!

God may not have chosen you (before the world began) to be in His

heavenly company. Sadly, regardless of your desire to live for Christ and to live a life of holiness, you may end up in hell finally! It all depends upon God's 'all-wise choice', and you dare not question the wisdom of Almighty God. After all, His ways are higher than your ways, as high as the heavens are above the earth, and so are His thoughts higher than your thoughts! Such are the 'cruel' teachings of Calvinism!

This Calvinistic 'reasoning' (based on the beliefs of this 'erroneous theological system') sends 'shivers down my spine!' There could not be more 'horrifying theological ideas'! This non-Christian teaching (which has persisted for centuries) should 'once-and-for-all' be eliminated from the 'library' of theological dissertations!

There are many sincere advocates of Calvinism whose lifestyle of holiness is far better than the theology that they sadly 'hold on to'! May these dear ones have the courage to 'shed' this 'bondage of Calvinism', and come into a true understanding of God's nature, as a result of seriously studying the New Testament!

Again, I say, this manmade theological system (Calvinism) is a system that has brought untold grief and anguish and doubt and terror to countless persons, during the last several centuries! The sooner this cruel (unbiblical) set of beliefs is eliminated from the thoughts and teachings of the Christian World - the BETTER!

Too many persons, for too many years, have been hurt by Calvinism, in too many ways! All Christians must affirm anew the broad teachings of the New Testament, and stop taking isolated and select texts (chapters) as the foundation of their falsely constructed theologies. Ephesians 1 and Romans 9 have long been misinterpreted to teach that God is deterministic and arbitrary.

Predestination, of course, is taught in the Bible, but not the type of predestination which Calvinism has long taught! God has not predestinated certain individuals to be saved and others to be lost. If that were true, a person's 'sense of justice' would be superior to God's 'sense of justice'.

Repeatedly, the Bible teaches that God is 'righteous', 'honest', 'just', 'holy', 'loving', 'merciful'! Calvinism, by it teaching that God is arbitrary in the selection of only some (possibly few) persons to be saved, independent of a person's exercise of his own 'free will' - this central tenant (doctrine) of Calvinism results in the denial of all the above-listed characteristics of God!

THE 'BIGGEST WORD' IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IS 'IF'!

Calvinists rightly assert that (according to the Bible's teaching, namely, Ephesians 2:8) it is the 'grace of God' (that is, God's unmerited favor) which alone can 'save' a sinner. No person can merit or deserve or earn salvation. Salvation is a 'gift' from God alone! Both Calvinists and Arminians fully agree that God is the source of forgiveness and new life!

However, there are some (perhaps most) Calvinists who contend that salvation is exclusively the 'arena' of God, and that humans have nothing at all to do with the 'fact' of salvation that is enjoyed in the life of a person (sinner). There are Calvinists (from the viewpoint of Arminians) who take the 'extreme' position of saying that, if humans have anything at all to do with the reality of salvation, God's sovereign control would be 'challenged' and 'discredited'!

Calvinists believe that, if one asserts that there are certain 'conditions' which humans (sinners) must meet, in order to be saved, that this means that one is 'working' for his salvation! They believe that, if humans have anything to do with the reality of 'salvation', they are violating the 'grace' of God, that they are attempting to be saved by their own 'good works'!

Calvinists, who strongly advocate the 'grace' of God (as the sole source of salvation), fail to distinguish between the 'source' of the free gift, and the need (biblically-speaking) of meeting the God-given 'conditions' in order to receive the 'free gift of salvation'!

It should be obvious to 'fair-minded' persons, that there is a difference between 'meeting certain conditions' and 'seeking to earn salvation through the commitment of good works'! We humans are in need of receiving a 'free gift' from God (God's act of unmerited favor),

but we should know (from understanding scripture) that the gift of God can only be received as certain 'conditions' are met! We are not taking away from the power and the authority of a grace-giving God, simply to suggest that certain 'conditions' must be met (conditions that the Grace-giver Himself has clearly established)!

The fact that God has created human beings with the capacity to make moral choices, quickly establishes the reality that there is a choice to be made, as to whether or not God's offer of new life will be accepted or rejected.

The idea of 'choice' is predominate, all throughout the Bible (both Old Testament and New Testament). God gave a choice to Israel - life or death, prosperity or poverty, sin or righteousness. Through Joshua, God challenged the Israelites: "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve!" The gift of God-like life was offered, but God could not force anyone to accept the wonderful gift of new life. Individual Israelites had to 'meet a condition' - namely, to exercise their will positively to follow the true God!

'Meeting a condition' is not the same as 'earning salvation' or performing 'works of the flesh' which invalidate the 'grace of God'! There are numerous scriptures that describe certain 'conditions' - 'conditions' which God Himself has established, 'conditions' if not met the 'promises of God' will not be fulfilled!

Without attempting to quote numerous Bible verses (which describe contingencies), I will simply refer to a few of the better known 'conditional verses'. *"IF we are faithful to the end, trusting God just as we did when we first became Christians, we will share in all that belong to Christ."* (Hebrews 3:14, Living Bible) *"We Christians are God's house - he lives in us! - If we keep up our courage firm to the end, and our joy and our trust in the Lord."* (Hebrews 3:6, Living Bible) *"IF my people will humble themselves and pray, and search for me, and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear them from heaven and forgive their sins and heal their land."* (II Chronicles 7:14 Living Bible) IF, IF, IF!

Fulfilling 'conditions' (all of which come from God) is not a form of 'good works' which we perform in order that we might gain the 'favor'

of God! Not at all! Rather, the meeting of conditions is our humble and our obedient response to the Great Gift-Giver!

Any great inheritance (including the greatest inheritance of all) requires that the receiver of the inheritance meets certain requirements (established by the giver of the inheritance). That simple reality applies to the great Grace-giver (our blessed Lord), as well as it applies to any human giver (and receiver) of any earthly inheritance!

It needs to be emphasized (and communicated especially to Calvinists) that there is a large difference between meeting 'God-established conditions' and in 'working for one's salvation' (and, thus, discrediting the 'grace' of God). Simply to meet certain conditions (that God Himself has given to mankind) is definitely not to attempt to 'work for one's salvation'!

If you received a large inheritance (from a deceased relative) you would not demonstrate that you 'deserved' or 'earned' the inheritance, simply because you fulfilled certain required simple 'conditions' in order for you to receive that inheritance. Of course, when we sinners fulfill certain (God-established) 'conditions', in order to receive the free gift of God's salvation, we are not 'working' for the inheritance, we are not discrediting the 'grace gift' that we have received!

Often in the Bible God lays down certain 'conditions' which we must meet (fulfill), in order for us to receive new life and in order of us to maintain new life (in Christ). Without quoting them in detail, here are a few of those 'IF' verses (in the New Testament). Jesus said, *"If you ask anything in my name, I will do it!"* (If a request is addressed to Jesus, that request must not violate the character 'traits' of Jesus). *"If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all unrighteousness!"* (If we fulfill the clearly stated 'condition', God will fulfill His promise to us). *"If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins!"* (In other words, this popular verse states that God does not give us salvation - based on some kind of divine and mysterious 'decree' that was decided before the foundation of the world - but God gives us forgiveness and conversion IF we personally and voluntarily and humbly confess our sins to Christ).

The consistent Calvinist (based on John Calvin's doctrines) would declare that God (in eternity) has already chosen His 'elect ones', and, therefore, there is no need for evangelism. God has chosen, therefore, why should any 'puny human' try to influence anyone to 'turn to Christ' for forgiveness?

***CALVINISM - DEFAMES GOD, MAN, SIN, JESUS, HOLY SPIRIT,
GRACE, AND FREE WILL!***

Calvinism, as has been pointed out, is fatalistic and terribly pessimistic. Calvinism defames God's character and purposes, and Calvinism also defames the nature of human beings (by its belief that humans have 'no say' (no determination) in his eternal destiny)! I can think of no theology that is more despicable and more degrading and more damning than the theological system (and popular thought) of Calvinism!

What John Calvin taught regarding Predestination (i.e., that God arbitrarily chose some humans to be saved and, obviously, chose to condemn the remainder of the human race) - there could not be a belief that more closely resembles the 'agenda' of the devil himself! As I stated before, the only difference between Calvin's belief (predestination) and the agenda of Satan, is that Satan wants everyone to go to hell, and Calvin (apparently) wants most people to go to hell!

Calvin believed that it was to the 'glory and honor of God' that God sent a large portion of humans to hell! That belief mimics (mirrors) the intention of Satan Himself! To change the loving God of the New Testament into the image of a monster (like Satan himself) is not only using God's name in vain, but it is to blaspheme against the Lord Jesus Christ who came to earth to die for every sinner, and who desires to save all, and who has sent the Holy Spirit into the world to draw all men to the saving side of the Savior!

The picture that is 'painted' (in dark colors) of God (by John Calvin) is the very opposite of the brightly colored portrait of Jesus Christ, whose blood was shed for the salvation of the entire world! How could any non-Christian theology exist for so very long in our world (among Western countries), and how could so many unenlightened (sincere) Christians continue to embrace such tragic ideas about God

and Man and Jesus Christ and Salvation (predestination)?

Calvinism does not grant anyone assurance of salvation! Why haven't more sincere persons (persons who think they are Christians) gone 'stark mad' with their fears that they may not have been chosen to compose God's 'elect group'?

'PREDESTINATION' - AGAINST THE LOVE AND MERCY AND JUSTICE OF MY TRUE GOD

How can Calvinistically-oriented persons know if they are among the 'favored group' whom God chose before the foundation of the world? With their haunting doubts (no assurance of personal salvation), it is no wonder that, at best, they are unhappy persons, and, at worst, these persons are close to going 'insane' with fear that someday they will discover that they were not among that 'elect group', and that their final destiny (beyond their own willing) will be in the 'lake of fire'! There could be no more 'cruel teaching' than the teaching of Calvinism - and, wonder of wonders, there are still many persons who are strong advocates of this fatalistic belief!

Anyone in his 'right mind' (saint and sinner) - who understood the actual teachings of John Calvin and St. Augustine - would rise up in total opposition to these 'devilish teachings'. Never mind that John Calvin is 'respected' for his numerous theological writings (some of which, amazingly, may be 'helpful' and 'insightful'). The sad fact remains that the 'cornerstone of his thinking' - namely, predestination - should make any open-minded person realize how 'hurtful' Calvin's theological 'premise' has been to countless persons, down through the centuries!

The sooner John Calvin's theological teachings (regarding his concept of Man and of God) are eliminated, not only from our seminaries but from contact by the 'common people', the better!

As just discussed in the above paragraphs, the consistent Calvinist would not even read all the Biblical (contingent) verses (the 'IF' verses), for those who adhere to John Calvin's writings (doctrines) would declare that God (from the foundation of the world) has already 'chosen' His 'elect ones' to be saved for all eternity!

To suggest 'contingencies' ("IF" verses) is to suggest that humans, indeed, have a moral choice - a choice as to whether or not 'free will agents' (humans) will accept or will reject Christ's call to repentance! But, from Calvin's perspective, God has already (through His sovereign power) chosen whom He desires to compose His 'elect group' (His 'favored and chosen' people)! God's 'chosen ones', arbitrarily chosen, and according to His 'hidden purposes'!

However, the 'inconsistent Calvinist' (and there are many such sincere persons) does not fully subscribe to the doctrine of predestination. The milder Calvinists are still 'evangelizing', but they, nevertheless, believe that salvation depends solely on the grace of God, on the power of Christ. They (to some extent) quote the "IF" verses, but (as I pointed out) they tend to confuse 'meeting conditions' for salvation, and 'working for your salvation'!

Even for these milder kinds of Calvinists, there is a tendency to believe that sinners who focus on the "If" verses are failing to realize that salvation is 'all grace'. Again, they fail to distinguish between 'meeting conditions' and 'working for one's salvation.'

They tend to think that 'meeting conditions' takes away from the grace of God, and that 'meeting conditions' is the same as trying to 'earn your salvation by good works'. They need to understand that meeting certain conditions to receive an inheritance is not taking away from the aspects of 'grace' in the giving and receiving of a 'free gift' (an unearned inheritance)!

DOES GOD HAVE 'FAVORITE PERSONS', OR DOES GOD LOVE EVERYONE EQUALLY?

Why spend considerable time and space analyzing the teachings of Calvinism? A simple answer is this: "What a man thinks, so is he!" Whatever you think about God (His nature and His activities) determines what you think about life (what you think about yourself, what you think about other persons, what you think about Jesus Christ, what you think about the meaning and the implications of personal salvation, what you think about the Holy Spirit's ministry, what you think about sin and repentance and restoration, what you think about personal assurance in the face of death).

Those persons who embrace the teachings of Calvinism (predestination and God's mysterious will, and all the implications from these 'premises'), I say, those persons who adhere to these teachings will develop a totally different 'world viewpoint' (mentally and socially and spiritually), than the person who is committed to the basic teachings of the New Testament! The New Testament teachings are totally contradictory to the teachings of Calvinism!

Practically-speaking, it is so wonderful that we believers can present a solid and positive message and offer to people, a universal message of God's love and forgiveness which encompasses everyone (including atheists and humanists and materialists). Not the horrible message which Calvinists possess (the frightening message of predestination), but the message of God's universal love and God's message of assurance of sins forgiven - the message of a God of mercy (not of wrath)!

Christianity is attractive to everyone - including the sincere humanist - because the message is the outgrowth of the nature of a 'positive and loving God' - a God who, because of Christ's 'finished work', offers salvation to everyone! Calvinism's message is 'exclusive' and 'discriminatory'! The message of Christianity is 'inclusive', without discrimination and without favoritism!

The New Testament declares that God loves all, and that no one is excluded from the 'family of God' and from life in heaven, unless one (a sinner) freely chooses to exclude himself from such 'gifts', by his own willful rejection and personal rebellion! "Whosoever will may come to the Savior of the world"? All are included in the 'elect family' of God, potentially, and are actually members of that divinely-designed 'family' based upon meeting the reasonable 'requirements' for membership in God's family!

God's intention for each person (sinner) to enjoy membership in that family is fulfilled when each person chooses to repent of his sin and to trust Christ to transform his life (personal conversion)! In contrast to the God of the New Testament, the God of Calvinism does not intend or desire for every human being to be a member of God's wonderful 'family'. Tragically, God intends for only a portion of mankind (perhaps a small portion of mankind) to enjoy the glories and joys of

eternal life!

Calvinism has little regard for humanity (in general) and for any single person (in specific) - except, of course, for God's pampered children (God's elect children)! Like despicable 'trash', God throws away much (probably most) of humanity (millions and millions of God-created persons) into hell, all because God (for some strange and mysterious reason) decided, before the foundation of the world, NOT to elect most of humanity to be members of the 'elect group' of God's favored ones!

To make this 'devilish plot' even more horrible, God actually takes 'pleasure' in sending the 'reprobates' (God-condemned souls) into hell! It is for God's 'honor' and 'praise' that these reprobates are damned forever in a 'devil's inferno'!

This Calvinist system (with predestination as the 'premise' of the system) has the 'features' of a plan that certainly was 'conceived' by the Devil himself! Both the Devil and this Calvinistic 'God' basically hate the human race, and both the Devil and this strange Calvinistic 'God' take delight when humans are pictured as mere 'pawns' (with no ability to exercise a positive will for personal salvation)! Both the Devil and this Calvinistic 'God' take delight when humans are finally cast into the fires of hell!

It is unthinkable (astounding) that any person (namely, John Calvin) could construct a so-called 'Christian' theology that could have horrendous 'elements' (beliefs) that defame everyone that is included in his system of thought - the defaming of God (His nature and character and intentions), the defaming of Man (denying the exercise of authentic 'free will'), the defaming of Jesus Christ (denial of His universal love for lost mankind, and the denial of Jesus' unlimited atonement), the defaming of the Holy Spirit (denial of the gift of repentance and saving faith which are given to every human being, making every person capable of becoming a Christian), the defaming of the Holy Bible (denial of the Bible's teaching that God loves everyone, that God has no 'favorites', that God as a 'good shepherd' is giving an invitation to every lost person to become a member of His 'flock').

Calvinism, far from representing the 'core' of Christianity, namely

'God Is Love', instead, pictures 'God' as the 'God' of wrath and judgment and favoritism and injustice and terror and overwhelming and all-determining 'power'! The difference between the Calvinistic 'God' and the God of the New Testament is the difference between 'night' and 'day', between 'good' and 'evil', between 'health' and 'sickness'!

Calvinism, when examined, even casually and especially in depth, proves itself to be a 'sick' and 'hurtful' theology - a theology that brings great sadness, not great happiness and security, to its adherents!

*IS GOD'S SELF-REVELATION MEANT TO COMFORT ME OR
TO TERRORIZE ME?*

The sooner this pain-producing theology is eliminated from the 'counsels' of human beings, the BETTER! Because of this pathetic, terror-producing theology, there have been countless (sincere) persons, through the ages, who have been terror-stricken (thrown into a virtual 'panic', because of the doctrine of predestination)! The doctrines of Calvinism (with the basic premise of predestination, God hating a large portion of the human race) are diametrically opposed to the central tenet of Christianity ('God Is Love')!

We can tell the atheist or humanist that God loves him individually, that God (before the foundation of the world) chose him to be saved for time and for eternity. We can offer him (realistically) what Jesus Himself offers him - namely, an abundant life here and an eternal life hereafter. We can offer the humanist hope for his despair, joy for his sadness, meaning for his purposelessness, forgiveness for his guilt, and companionship for his loneliness!

Jesus said that His 'yoke' was easy (i.e. it fits perfectly, custom-made for each person's gifts, talents). The 'yoke' of Calvinism does not fit, that is, this manmade set of doctrines does not 'fit' any human being, for each human being is designed by God to experience the forgiveness of sins, and the assurance of eternal life, and the confidence that he is included in the family of God on earth and in heaven! Calvinism denies all of this!

Jesus said that His 'burden' is light (i.e. the responsibility that God has given to each person, is the exact responsibility that is suited for the person). Knowledge of who God is (a loving and accepting God, the knowledge of what God's mission for a person is) brings challenge, delight, and creative involvement. In contrast the burden of 'Calvinism' is intolerable!

*DOES GOD HAVE A 'HAND' OF COMFORTING LOVE, OR
OF HARSH CONDEMNATION?*

The 'burden' of Calvinism is heavy, unbearable, oppressive - because Calvinism does not bring assurance and joy and delight, for there is a sense that God is forbidding and restrictive and demanding and forlorn and angry and arbitrary in the selection of 'favorites' for His kingdom family! How can a person truly be 'happy' when he is 'burdened' with the frightening (terrorizing) teachings of Calvinism (with Predestination being the primary 'premise' for the entire theological system)? The 'yoke' is hard, and the 'burden' is heavy - this briefly describes Calvinism!

Why would anyone - including humanists and materialists and hedonists and atheists - desire to 'bow the knee' before a Calvinistically-constructed God? To know about the teachings of Calvinism is to decide to repudiate these teachings! And to turn decisively away from this manmade 'God'! But, in contrast, to know about the God of the New Testament - to know about the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ - is to be strongly drawn to this loving God!

There is something strongly attractive about Jesus Christ! With His arms outstretched, He speaks in kindness: "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest!"

God gives to every person the 'gift' of repentance and the 'gift' of saving faith, thus, every person is 'savable' (that is, each person is capable of being saved). God is not willing that any person should perish (go to hell), but that every person should exercise his God-given 'gift' of repentance and faith, and thus to be converted (and to enjoy an abundant life here on earth and an eternal life in heaven eventually). These are the 'foundational facts' regarding the nature of God and the nature of God's saving provision through Jesus Christ.

God's love is universal. His gifts of repentance and faith are universal. God's call to salvation is universal. God's offer of new life in Christ is universal. God's power to transform (change) the nature of lost sinners is universal. God's offered gift of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in the heart of every person is universal.

God's promise of eternal life in heaven is universal! No wonder the Christian is 'constitutionally' happy. The knowledge that Jesus, through his death on the cross and because of his glorious resurrection, has won the victory over sin and over death and over hell and over the devil - knowledge of these 'realities' brings joy to one's heart and a holy laughter to one's lips.

When one carefully reads the Gospel accounts of the ministry of Christ, one can discern that Christ was not only a 'man of sorrows who was acquainted with grief', but that Christ was also a man who often expressed joy and hearty laughter. After all, Jesus enjoyed the laughter at wedding parties so much that His critics (unjustly) called him a 'wine bibber'!

*WHAT HAPPENS TO YOU IF YOU SERVE A 'LOVELESS GOD'
OR A 'LOVING GOD'?*

We have repeatedly noted that the 'God' of Calvinism is a loveless God, whereas the 'God' who is portrayed in the New Testament is definitely a loving God! What difference does it make to persons in general, and to you in particular, if the object of worship is a loveless 'God', or if the object of worship is a loving 'God'? The short answer to that important question is that it makes all the difference in the world!

We humans become (in character) like the character of the 'God' we worship. 'Like father, like son!' We humans imitate the character of the 'God' we serve. The Bible itself commands us to 'imitate God as dear children!' If God is a loving God, and if I continuously 'imitate' this loving God, I (gradually) will become a 'loving person'! This is an obvious and easy principle (truth) for anyone to grasp!

After our detailed examination of Calvinism (as a theological system), we now must spend a brief time looking at the character of the man (John Calvin) who 'invented' the system. As we have repeatedly noted, John Calvin declared his 'God' to be a God who predestined a large portion of humanity to 'hell'! A most frightening and calloused declaration, a declaration, obviously, not supported by the holy Bible!

The God that John Calvin 'invented' was a 'God' who denied humans the exercise of authentic 'free will', a 'God' who basically 'hated' (despised) the majority of the human race, a 'God' who took 'glory' to Himself when His sovereign will to condemn humans to hell was finally fulfilled!

Anyone who contemplates the hateful theology of John Calvin should, on one hand 'shake in his boots' with terror, and, on the other hand, rise up in revolt against a theology which defames God's character (of justice and love), and which defames Jesus Christ (and His 'finished work' on the Cross), and which defames Mankind (the capability of all persons to be saved because of the universal love of God for every person).

A 'holy outrage' against Calvinism - this loveless theological system - should be boldly advanced, throughout the entire world. The tenets of Calvinism are in direct contradiction against the central tenet of Christianity, namely, God's universal love for all mankind!

The person (believer) who is in deep love with Jesus Christ must repudiate the cruel teachings of Calvinism. Those Calvinistic adherents who think they are doing 'honor' to God by accepting His 'total sovereign control' of the world, have not yet 'seen below the surface' of this theological system, to discover the horror of 'predestination' and other disconcerting teachings - like the derogatory attitude of Calvinism towards man's 'free will' (man's 'input' into the determination of man's salvation and his final eternal destiny). He who seriously examines the tenets of Calvinism will (if he has an 'open mind') conclude that there is an 'insurmountable gulf' between the theology of Calvinism and the sound theology of the New Testament!

An honest person (who wishes to be committed to the New Testament teaching) will repudiate all the teachings of Calvinism! To

look honestly and carefully at Calvinism is to see a terrifying picture of a merciless, all-controlling, loveless, unjust 'God' whose mysterious (hidden) sovereign will cannot be discovered or even questioned by 'fallen human beings' (reprobates)!

Even though human beings (who have keen 'moral sensitivity') acknowledges that the Calvinistic 'brand' of 'God' is exceedingly 'unjust', adherents of Calvinism, nevertheless, are told to simply serve this kind of 'all-controlling' God, and not to question the ways of their God!

Even though, obviously, the 'justice standards' of the average person (Christian and non-Christian) are much 'higher' and more 'fair' than what is revealed in the character of the Calvinistic 'God', never mind! Adherents of Calvinism are told that they must not question the mysterious (hidden) ways of Almighty God! Why should fallen creatures (finite, frail, puny creatures of the dust) question the ways of the Almighty (all-powerful) God?

The ways of the Almighty God are higher than the ways of finite (fallible) human beings! Who are we temporal creatures to be questioning (or criticizing) the ways of the God of the Heavens! God's ways may, to you, seem unjust and unfair (according to your human standards of justice), but you must submit to the 'ways of the sovereign God'! Remember, as high as the heavens are above the earth, so are God's thoughts compared to man's finite thoughts! This is the common 'reasoning' of Calvinist teachers and preachers, in trying to answer the honest objections of uncomfortable lay persons (in the church pews) in Calvinistic-type local churches (or Calvinistic-type colleges).

This reasoning of Calvinists (teachers and theologians) results in a denial of man's human (reasoning) mind, and a denial of man's deep sensitive emotional nature, and a denial of man's capacity to act (to make his own, God-enabled decisions regarding moral life and moral outcomes)! A harsh and cruel type of God, a 'God' whose portrait is 'black' compared to the bright and beautiful and loving and kind portrait of the God who is known through the life and ministry of the altogether loving Jesus Christ (the Savior and Healer and Redeemer and Reconciler and Loving Companion of every human being)!

The 'God' of the New Testament is diametrically opposed to the 'invented God of Calvinism'! In fact, the 'God' of Calvinism is a direct 'enemy' of the 'God' of the New Testament (regardless of the number of Calvinistic adherents there have been in this world, both past and present). It is sad (beyond description) that there have been so many persons (precious souls) who have been 'deceived and blinded' by this 'false system' of looking at life (a drab and discouraging and terrifying way of looking at life)!

What kind of 'God' did John Calvin 'focus' on? A 'God, whose actions towards the majority of the human race were 'cruel' and 'heartless' and 'arbitrary' and 'unjust' and 'unmerciful' and certainly 'unloving'. A 'God' who denied the exercise of any meaningful, i.e., genuine human freedom'! Is it any wonder then that John Calvin's actions became 'autocratic', 'cruel', 'heartless', 'arbitrary', 'unjust', 'unmerciful', 'unloving', and even 'murderous'? He, like the 'God' he served, denied the exercise of 'freedom' to the 'subjects' whom he 'ruled'!

Writes Frank Schaeffer (son of well-known Francis Schaeffer who considered himself a 'Calvinist'):

"Calvin's own life and work was consistent with service to his harsh 'God'. When Calvin's sermons failed to convince, he resorted to force in prohibiting 'unseemly acts' or words. Since, in Calvin's Geneva, virtually all entertainment was proscribed as 'unseemly' and even dozing in church was a punishable offense, a very dreary, self-righteous religion emerged that came to be called Puritanism.

"The slightest criticism enraged Calvin. Those who questioned his theology were dismissed as 'pigs,' 'asses', 'riffraff,' 'dogs', 'idiots,' and 'stinking beasts'. One morning Calvin found a poster on his pulpit accusing him of 'Gross Hypocrisy'. Since Calvin indirectly ruled his city state of Geneva as well as being its chief theologian and grand inquisitor, he did not have to accept this 'scandalous affront' lying down. A suspect was arrested. No evidence was produced, but he was tortured day and night for a month until he confessed. Then his feet were nailed to a stake by which he hung in public for a day. Ultimately he was

decapitated.

"Since Calvin's 'god' allowed no free will, Calvin saw no reason to, either. Calvin's justification for the execution of the unfortunate, alleged 'mockers,' who had left the offending message on Calvin's pulpit, reveals the shamelessly self-righteous mind set of all the reformation's tyrannical inquisitors. 'When the papists are so harsh' wrote Calvin, 'are not Christ's magistrates shamed to show themselves less ardent in defense of the sure truth?'" (Dancing Alone' Frank Shaeffer; pgs. 83, 84)

What did John Wesley (a strong advocate of the Arminian theology, and a diligent student of the New Testament) think of 'absolute, unconditional election and reprobation'? Wesley (one of the most brilliant minds in modern history): "I think it cannot be found in holy writ, and that it is a plant which bears dismal fruit. An instance of which we have in Calvin himself, who confesses that he procured the burning to death of Michael Servetus, purely for differing from his opinion in matters of religion." (Calvinism Calmly Considered; by John Wesley; pg. 91)

Who was Michael Servetus? He was an amazing man and astute scholar, whose talents were many! One of the greatest crimes in history was committed by John Calvin against this remarkable Christian man (a man of many talents, a man who chose to register honest disagreements with Calvin). This man was considered a 'heretic' by Calvin, and, consequently, Calvin consented to his being burned at the stake! A form of brutal religious persecution, perpetuated by a theologian who could not countenance any religious differences!

Servetus was a versatile man, a man who studied the biblical languages as well as mathematics, philosophy, theology, and law. In addition to the many and worthy accomplishments, he became a physician. In answer to Calvin's 'Institutes of the Christian Religion' (multi-volumes of Calvin's theological writings), Servetus himself wrote 'Restitution Christianity' in 1553, and, as a result of his attacks on Calvin, he was arrested and he was condemned and he was eventually burned (with the 'full consent' of Calvin)!

*'IMITATING' AN ALL-LOVING GOD 'PRODUCES' A VERY
LOVING SERVANT OF GOD!*

Again, it is important to remember that a person becomes like the 'God' whom he serves! Calvin served a 'cruel' and 'unfeeling' and 'unmerciful' God, and, therefore, Calvin too became 'cruel' and 'unmerciful' and 'unloving' in his reactions to his 'theological enemies'!

It is said that a 'stream' cannot flow higher than its 'source'. And a 'servant' (Calvin) cannot be expected to be 'better' in his character and behavior than the 'master' whom he served (namely, the 'God' of arbitrary favoritism whom Calvin 'constructed' from his erroneous interpretation of Scripture).

Even though I believe (as stated above) that there is generally-speaking a 'correlation' between what one believes theologically and how one lives and reacts to people, it is not 'accurate' or 'fair' (and it is not 'charitable') to suggest that all 'Calvinists' are 'loveless' and 'insensitive'. Indeed, there are many so-called 'Calvinists' whose lives seem to be 'compassionate' and 'loving'. However, the 'loving lives of Calvinists' is 'in spite of their theology', not 'because of their theology'! Such persons (who claim to be 'Calvinists', and who, nevertheless, are loving in their general approach to people) are 'living far above their theology'!

The 'God' whom John Wesley served was the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ - the God who is best revealed by the Incarnate One whose every action was an action of 'holy love.' Jesus never did or said anything that was not loving. And what Jesus was in 'human form', God has always been in His 'eternal essence'. The Bible says that *'God Is Love'* (1 John 4).

John Wesley reflected the character of God. Because Wesley worshiped the 'God of love', Wesley became a man of holy love! What you 'gaze at' (holy love), you soon become (a man of holy love)! The more you 'imitate' the God of love, the more you become like the one you imitate. Growth in the ways of 'holy love' is unlimited - here on earth, and certainly in heaven!

Heaven is a place where only love exists and reigns, a place where the citizens of heaven are constantly experiencing growth in the very loving One who rules by love alone! When one is expressing the love of God here on earth, he is simply having a small foretaste of the love of God which shall be experienced in ever greater degrees forever in God's Kingdom of Holy Love!

John Wesley, in contrast to John Calvin, was a man who was saturated with the love of God. His entire life (his attitudes and his actions and his relationships) was driven by God's holy love! John Wesley, in contrast to John Calvin, worshiped the 'God of Love' - the God who is best revealed by the incarnate Christ.

John Wesley was 'lost in wonder, love and praise'. Love was the 'central theme' of Wesley's messages, and it was the 'driving force' of Wesley's amazing 'feats of compassion.' Wesley's life was 'crammed full of love projects!' Everywhere he went, he spread God's love! He loved the 'loveless', the 'oppressed', the 'lost' and the 'wicked'. His tireless efforts, over many decades, were the result of the 'love of God' which had consumed him!

It was the *'love of God'*, shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5), which was the 'driving force' in Wesley's long life. Wesley was not self-preoccupied, not self-absorbed, not overly introspective, but Christ-centered, love-saturated, others-oriented! A man who was deeply in love with his God as evidenced by his tireless efforts in loving the lost and the suffering and the oppressed and the poverty-stricken persons around him.

One of Wesley's (non-Methodist) contemporaries wrote about the 'passionate Wesley':

"To one great purpose he dedicated his powers of body and mind; for this he relinquished all honor and preferment. At all times and in all places, in season and out of season, by gentleness, by terror, by argument, by persuasion, by reason, by interest, by every motive and every inducement, he strove, with unwearied assiduity, to turn men from the error of their ways and awaken them to virtue and religion. To the bed of sickness, or the couch of prosperity; to the prison or the hospital; to the

house of mourning or the house of feasting, wherever there was a friend to serve or a soul to save, he readily repaired. He thought no office too humiliating, no condescension too low, no undertaking too arduous, to reclaim the meanest of God's offspring. The souls of all men were of equal value in his sight and the salvation of the immortal creature unutterable precious". (Quoted in 'Goodly Heritage" J. Paul Taylor; pg. 69)

Why was John Wesley so in love with humanity? Why was love the 'dominant force' in his ministry for so many decades - the 'key' to his unusually fruitful work with the 'disenfranchised' and the 'uncouth' and the 'despairing' and the 'unlovely' and the 'illiterate' multitudes in the degenerate society in which he lived? Like a 'magnet', his love drew the 'guilt-ridden' and 'neglected' and 'abused' and 'spiritually-desperate' persons to him.

Where did John Wesley get this 'supernatural', 'creative', 'winsome', 'tender' love? The simple (and yet very correct) answer is that he got it (i.e., this 'unusual love') from the 'God of Love' whom he worshiped and adored and imitated and served and obeyed when a 'servant' focuses long enough upon his 'master' he becomes like his 'master'!

The 'servant' becomes like his 'master' - in words, in attitudes, in actions, in reactions, in total lifestyle! Jesus is the 'Sun', and Wesley was the 'Moon', for Wesley only reflected 'borrowed light' - He had no 'inherent' or 'intrinsic' or 'native' light- only 'borrowed light'! Jesus alone is the 'Light of the World', but Wesley was one of the best 'reflectors' of that 'Divine Light' that can be found in all of human history!

Remember: Whether one is talking about John Calvin or John Wesley (or any other person), an individual finally becomes like the 'God' whom he serves. If one serves a 'God' who is arbitrary and forbidding and harsh and unjust and cruel, then one will eventually 'reflect' those same characteristics (attributes and behavior) in his own life! Of course, the opposite is also true. If one serves a 'God of Love', then eventually he will become a love-filled person.

There are countless others, obviously, besides John Wesley, who

guided their life by the power of God's indwelling love. For instance, it has been pointed out by reliable writers that the Early Methodists were known as 'love-driven' and 'compassionate-minded' persons. J. Paul Taylor notes:

"The love of Christ was the full head of steam that drove the wheels of spiritual commerce in early Wesleyanism. The word of God was like fire shut up in the bones of the primitive (early) Methodists. It must have vent. They did not go because they were authorized or commanded to go. They went out into the highways and hedges and compelled the people to come in through the compulsion of love." (Goodly Heritage; by J. Paul Taylor; pg. 70)

The following is one of Wesley's strongest passages on 'God's love': "It were well you should be thoroughly sensible of this, 'The heaven of heavens is love.' There is nothing higher in religion; there is, in effect, nothing else; if you look for anything more than love, you are looking wide of the mark, you are getting out of the royal way, and when you are asking others, 'Have you received this or that blessings?' If you mean anything but more love, you mean wrong; you are leading them out of the way, and putting them upon a false scent. Settle it then in your heart, that from the moment God has saved you from all sin, you are to aim at nothing more, but more of that love described in the thirteenth of the Corinthians. You can go no higher than this, till you are carried into Abraham's bosom." (Quoted in 'A Theology of Love', by Mildred Bangs Wynkoop; pg. 22)

Notes Mildred Wynkoop: "It does not take long, in reading Wesley, to discover that love is the theme of his entire ministry, thinking, interpretation of theology, actions in respect of humanity, and everything he said or did." (Ibid; pg. 26)

What one thinks of 'God' largely determines what one becomes in his own attitudes and actions. If you serve a 'God' who despises most people, then you too will eventually begin to despise people. If, on the other hand, you serve a 'God' who loves everyone, then you too will eventually begin to love all persons (even those who are not very 'lovely'). Love is the test of our right relationship with God.

"This is his command: to give our allegiance to his Son Jesus Christ and love one another as he commanded." (I John 3:23 NEB)

What God commands - namely, to love all persons - God supplies - that is, the Holy Spirit sheds abroad God's love in the human heart.

"And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us". (Romans 5:5).

And why is God able to shed abroad love in the human heart? Because God Himself is Love Personified! God's love for humanity is 'unconditional', 'uncaused', 'unlimited', 'eternal', and 'unselfish'. And love that is 'communicated' - 'given', to the person who has a 'broken and contrite heart', and who is willing to receive God's gift of His supernatural love.

God is Love, and all of God's actions are the actions of Holy Love. Therefore, 'Calvinistic Predestination' which portrays 'God' as the One who 'damns' the majority of the human race, simply because 'God sovereignly chooses to condemn', must be outrightly rejected and repudiated!

WHAT ABOUT THE 'UNMERITED SUFFERING' OF GODLY PERSONS?

Serious-minded persons (including serious-minded Christians) have often asked the aforementioned question (and other similar questions) regarding the 'mystery of human suffering'. Some good, but incomplete, answers have been given to these questions, in an attempt to satisfy men's minds and to comfort men's hearts, but, honesty demands that we must admit that all inquirers probably have as many questions as they now have answers regarding 'human suffering'.

Finite persons (regardless of their high level of intelligence) can hardly fathom the 'mind of the infinite God'. The Bible says that God's 'ways' are higher than man's 'ways', as high as the heavens are above the earth, and so are God's thoughts compared to the thoughts of man!

It is right and it is proper for humans to inquire and to probe and to

contemplate the ways of God, for God gave humans a mind that, in some ways, reflects the mind of Almighty God. God has been pleased to reveal some of His thoughts and some of His ways to finite man.

God primarily reveals truth about Himself through the written Word (the Bible), and secondarily through the 'pages of Nature'. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" - this statement amazingly states that God has been pleased to reveal to man some of the thoughts that are in the mind of the glorious Son of God! This seems 'too good to be true', but God has willed it to be true.

Because we humans (at our very best) are still members of a 'fallen race', imperfect in our body and mind and spirit, and because we humans are subject (even at our best) to mistakes and to misjudgments, we humans (including Christians) must not be dogmatic or proud in our claims to understanding the ways and the will of Almighty God!

The fact that equally intelligent and equally godly persons (Christians) disagree about important matters (like the mystery of 'human suffering') demonstrates the fact that (at best) Christians now (on earth) perceive 'reality' as if they were 'looking through a colored glass' (not through a 'clear glass'). At best, we humans, who are very limited in our capacity to perceive 'reality' from God's perspective, can understand only a small portion of the whole 'horizon of truth'.

What we see of truth is most wonderful, but we can only see the bare outlines of reality. We can see only a small part of reality, as if we were peering through a 'hazy, colored window'!

We must continue to ask questions and to seek solutions to the 'riddles of life' (to the troublesome questions regarding the 'dilemmas of human suffering'), but, amidst all our continuing 'honest and diligent inquiries', we must humbly admit that the 'half has not yet been told', that there is so much that we finite creatures will never know!

We must have a teachable, humble, prayerful attitude, for God cannot and will not reveal Himself and His exalted 'ways' to the proud and haughty and self-reliant and close-minded persons!

The conclusions we draw regarding the difficult and the complex issues of 'human suffering' must be 'tentative' conclusions, that is, 'tentative' conclusions unless the Bible speaks explicitly and clearly regarding some 'aspect' of the broader topic.

Whether these mysteries (regarding 'human suffering') will be revealed to us earthly creatures, we do not know. Probably some questions regarding the 'mysteries of human suffering' will never be fully revealed to humans, while we roam the beautiful fields of this amazing earth. Will our questions regarding the 'unmerited suffering' of godly people only be answered when 'earth's sufferers' get to heaven?

Will God unlock the mysteries, and will God clearly reveal the meaning of His sovereign purposes (i.e., purposes for so much suffering on this planet)? Will God think it necessary (or desirable) to give an answer regarding the mysteries of human suffering, an answer from the perspective of His 'eternal purposes'?

When we (by God's grace) 'end up on those heavenly shores' (in our home of no ending), will our inquiring mind be satisfied and will our crushed spirit be healed, as these resulted from earth's experiences of great suffering?

Or, will our joys and our glory and our health be so perfected, that we heavenly citizens (clothed with our heavenly body) have no recall or remembrance of the trials (sufferings) that we experienced on earth? Perhaps, in our heavenly 'state', we will have no interest whatever to ask questions regarding the mystery of human suffering (as we personally experienced it on earth).

Will the heavenly citizens (who were aborted babies on earth) have any need or have any desire to ask God for an explanation for their premature death at the hands of a selfish mother and a cooperating doctor? Will those millions of Jews who were slaughtered by the Nazi regime need to or want to ask why they were the unfortunate victims of evil persons during an evil regime on earth? No one knows the answers to these honest and penetrating questions.

God is the 'Great Compensator', and God will abundantly 'compensate' persons who died prematurely (like aborted babies)

and who died unjustly (like the Jews in the concentration camps).

Remember: God is a debtor to no man. God will surely 'pay' those who deserve to be paid (even though their deserved 'pay' is a long time in coming)! God will 'make it up' to those who suffered at the hands of evil persons (like aborted babies and like Jews who suffered terribly and unjustly).

Make no mistake about it: God is a perfectly just God, and no wrong escapes God's attention! Sooner or later (on this earth, or in eternity) God will 'balance the books' (the books of justice). All evil will be punished and all righteousness will be rewarded. Though the wrong seems often so strong, God is the Ruler yet. God will 'redress all wrongs'. He will vindicate His justice!

Sinful men think they can commit evil, with impunity (i.e., they think they can sin 'in secret' without any accountability or any punishment). So much of the suffering in our world is the result of the criminal actions of evil men. Often, persons are irresponsible in their behavior (such as a drunkard who disturbs an entire household, or like an irresponsible husband who divorces his wife and, thus, greatly hurts his children).

There often is a chain reaction affect, as a result of the sinful actions of an adulterous husband, and (tragically) that chain effect of suffering can go on for many years. To break God's moral laws, not only brings suffering to the lawbreaker, but the lawbreaker, in turn, negatively affects many others (obviously his wife and his children, but often his extended family members).

DOES GOD REALLY CARE FOR THE FATHERLESS CHILDREN?

The suffering, caused by another's irresponsible (sinful) behavior, is often intense, and the 'tears' flow and flow from the eyes of innocent victims. Only God can fully understand the intensity of the pain that children feel, after their father abandons their mother, and they no longer have the security that a father gives to children! Think of the pain of refugee children, left alone, following an attack by 'terrorists'!

How can one calculate the degree and the longevity of the pain that these orphaned children feel? "Jesus, thou art all compassion, pure unbounded love thou art, enter every trembling heart." Jesus is the great 'Rescuer' of the lost and the dying, the heartbroken and the despairing. There is never a sorrow, but what Jesus shares it! He sees every 'tear' that the helpless and the hopeless shed! Jesus was 'a man of sorrows, who was acquainted with grief'. There is no one who understands the human plight like the loving Jesus! Jesus loves and understands the 'plight' of the fatherless child! New Testament teaching, in contrast to the discriminating teachings in contrast to the discriminatory teachings of Calvinism, has a 'high' and 'sane' view of God's Justice. Wrong will be punished, and right will eventually be rewarded! The God of Love (in contrast to the God of Favoritism) will see to it that all persons eventually will receive a 'just treatment'!

*WHAT CAN THE HOLY SPIRIT DO ABOUT
HUMAN SUFFERING?*

We may not fully understand with our mind why 'certain things' (suffering) happen, but when our mind is 'void' of understanding, our hearts, nevertheless, can 'feel' the sympathy and the love of our blessed Savior. The Bible calls the Holy Spirit (the 3rd person of the Trinity) the 'Comforter'. This word in the original language means 'the one who is called alongside of a needy person'.

That needy person might need a 'comforter' (a companion) to go with him to a legal court, to aid him in making a proper defense. Another needy person might need the 'comforter' to go with him through one of life's difficult experiences, like a hard trial, or like a heartbreaking sorrow! The 'Comforter' ('Holy Spirit') is man's 'Helper' (companion) - the one who is called alongside of a needy person!

When our hearts are breaking, when our dreams have died, when our inner spirit is damaged because of our own moral failures, or because someone around us (like an abandoned father) has deeply hurt us, or because we are facing the trauma of a terminal illness, or because we have lost an important job, or because we as a teen are facing the ridicule or bullying from our school peers, or because, or because, or because!

You name the particular 'crisis' that you are facing (the suffering of one kind or another). It is 'good news' to know that Jesus sent into our world (on the Day of Pentecost) the 'Comforter' (the blessed Holy Spirit). The Holy Spirit (Comforter) is ready to 'come along beside you' to encourage you and to guide you, during every difficult experience of your life! Every morning, before you leave your bed, call upon the blessed Spirit to come along beside you during your every 'movement' of your day! The Spirit's main 'function' on earth is to enable believers to 'exalt Christ' in all they think and do!

Just as Jesus is the 'sympathizing Friend' (the One who can perfectly 'identify' with suffering mankind), so the blessed Holy Spirit is the 'Comforter' - the One who is hovering over our 'weeping world' - to heal us and to guide us and to protect us from all 'evil'! In contrast to the picture of the Calvinistic God, there is nothing arbitrary in the ways of the New Testament God.

The 'Comforter' is ready and He is able, and He is willing to 'come to our aid', to heal the brokenhearted, to lift up the fallen, to speak words of reassurance to the discouraged, to apply the 'healing balm' to the wounds of hurting and suffering folks. In all these ministries of comfort, the Holy Spirit is intent on raising our sights to worship and to praise the Living Christ!

He is the perfect 'Comforter', but you must allow Him to 'comfort' you - to comfort you in a hundred different ways! **O** Hallelujah, the Comforter has come! Someone said that if you take just 'one step' towards the 'Comforter', the 'Comforter' will take a thousand steps toward you!

***CAN I BE HEALED WITHOUT THE SURRENDER OF MY 'WILL'
TO GOD?***

The Comforter (Holy Spirit), because He has a profound respect for the human 'free will', will not Force Himself upon anyone. However, if you activate your 'will' in a movement (however small) towards the 'Comforter', then the 'Comforter' will respond positively towards you.

The Comforter is a divine person, and, as such, He has a divine mind, a divine heart (feelings), and a divine will (purpose)! He is a Divine

Person. The Bible exhorts us to respond to the 'Comforter' with profound respect and with sincere worship and with genuine love.

The 'Comforter', (as a Person), can be 'quenched', can be 'grieved', and can be 'resisted'. The 'Comforter' wants to be our 'Helper' (the One who is called alongside of us), but, without the willing consent of a human being, the Comforter will not minister to a human being, that is, to a human being who is resistant or who is indifferent to the Spirit's overtures of divine love.

The 'Comforter' will not 'force' His way into our lives. He very much wants to be our 'Divine Friend', but He waits to be invited into our lives - to be invited into our lives so that He may minister to us in various ways - to comfort us in our sorrows, to guide us in our decisions, to heal us in our hurts, to strengthen us in our weakness, to enlighten us in our confusion, and so much more!

The Spirit (Comforter) is willing and He is desirous to administer healing to our multiple hurts and sufferings, but He awaits our willing response to His loving invitation to us!

I must surrender my human will to His divine (perfect) will, if I am to enjoy His healing presence. He has not come (primarily) to explain to me the reasons for all my sufferings (some of which seem to defy my reason), but the Spirit has come for a more important purpose - to glorify the living Christ, and to bring comfort and healing to those who are hurting in the Body of Christ!

I must not try to explain all the mysteries of human suffering (although intellectual inquiry is permitted by the God who created my brain)! Also, I certainly must not try to explain away my suffering (which a particular religion tends to do), but I must (most importantly) allow the Spirit to enable me to 'use' my suffering in some positive way.

Either the Spirit (as the 'Comforter') will heal my suffering (outrightly or gradually), or the Spirit will enable me to live with my continuing suffering and thus become a stronger believer as a result of living with the suffering! The New Testament places great emphasis on the importance of seeking God with the surrender of my will to conform to the will of the Almighty and Loving God! God honors my will!

*ASK GOD TO 'USE' YOUR SUFFERING FOR SOME
BENEFICIAL PURPOSE!*

Someone said (so wisely) that, in light of the mysteries of human suffering, we should not try to 'explain suffering', nor should we try to deny suffering (i.e., we should not try to 'explain away suffering'), but that we should seek to 'use' suffering in some way for our own benefit and for the benefit of others. In other words, we should not allow our suffering to be 'wasted'.

We should learn some life lessons (as a result of going through our suffering) - lessons that will enable us to grow in our 'faith' (in our walk with Christ). No one likes suffering, and no one should 'seek' suffering, but when suffering comes to us (from several possible sources), we ought (with the help of the Spirit) to 'get some good out of our suffering'!

Now (on earth) we see reality, as if we are peering through a 'tinted glass' (not a 'clear glass'), but then (in heaven) we shall see reality more clearly - and probably see reality 'progressively' as knowledge continues to be unfolded to us, throughout the 'endless ages of eternity'! I do not know what is meant by the Biblical promise, but it is an amazing statement: "We (believers) shall know, even as we are known!"

As I have previously noted, in 'light' of the kind and the immensity of 'human suffering' in the world, I have found great comfort in the concept of 'compensation'. Because God is, indeed, a God who is all-loving and all-powerful, and all-just, I believe that God is the 'Great Compensator'!

If not always in this world, in eternity God will vindicate every person who has suffered unjustly in this world. God will not be a 'debtor' to any person who has been the object of unjust treatment. God, the 'Great Compensator', will make it up to those who die 'before their time', whether that death was because of 'war' or because of 'disease' or because of 'accident' or because of 'natural disaster' or because of 'abortion'!

*IS THE DEATH OF EVERY PERSON ACCORDING TO GOD'S
PERFECT WILL?*

Some people (including some believers) think that whenever or however a person dies, that this particular death was 'God's will'. They believe that 'whenever a person dies', it is 'God's will'! This concept is based on their strong belief in God's 'sovereignty'! This belief, to me, is both 'dangerous' and it is not 'Biblical'! Such persons (who, in my understanding, have a 'twisted view' of God's sovereignty) believe that God has only 'one will', not 'two wills'!

If, according to Calvinists, God (as sovereign) has only 'one will', then, based on this way of thinking, all events that happen in life are God's will! It is apparent to me that such a belief results in making God the 'author of suffering', and ultimately the 'author of evil'!

If, according to Calvinists, everything that happens on earth, happens only because God (who, as sovereign), has everything under His control, then that means that God even wills the 'bad things' that happen (including human suffering and human evil). Calvinism has a 'strange', (unbiblical) way of looking at life and at all of relationships and at all events of life!

*IS GOD ULTIMATELY THE 'AUTHOR' (SOURCE) OF
ALL 'EVIL'?*

Those who hold this 'strange view of the world' basically deny the 'genuine' exercise of human 'free will'. Because God is in total control (their idea of God's sovereignty), then humans don't really have the ability to 'make any real difference' (i.e., any genuine 'free choice') in the world.

This concept of God's sovereignty (that is, that God has only 'one will' and that God exercises that powerful will, with a denial of human free will) - I say that this view forces one to posit all evil events (like abortion) at the 'feet of God'! A frightening and unbiblical conclusion!

If one believes, as the Calvinists do, that God has only 'one will', and, therefore, all that happens on the earth is a manifestation of the sov-

ereign (mysterious) purposes of God, one would have to conclude (logically) that the 'bad' things as well as the 'good' things of earth are a direct (or indirect) extension of God's mysterious (hidden) will! That means that the 'bad' things that people normally attribute to the 'evil one' are now attributed to God Himself. A most frightening thought!

If God has only 'one will' (rather than in addition a 'permissive will'), then the simplistic and the most terrible conclusion is that all that happens on this planet is a manifestation of God's eternal purposes!

In other words, the unholy events of earth are an expression of the will of an all-holy God! What a confusion of thought, what an illogical mental concept, what blasphemy against the God who declared that His very eyes are so 'pure' that He cannot even look on 'evil'! Evil is the opposite of righteousness, and God is altogether righteous in His nature!

How could such a God (of absolute holiness) be responsible for the 'evil, unholy events' of the earth (like the abortion of millions of babies, and like the slaughter of millions of Jews during W.W. II)? Tragically, these are the kinds of conclusions that have to be drawn, if one believes (like the Calvinists) that God has only one will (a 'perfect will') without a 'permissive will' (that permits the genuine exercise of human 'free will' - a will that has the ability to choose 'evil' rather than to choose 'good')!

This apparently is what Calvinism actually believes (since Calvinism denies the belief that God allows the genuine expression of 'free will' - the consequence of which is the decision, at times, for humans to choose to do evil).

When one posits two wills to God, one is able to 'make better sense' of the world of human events, where there is the intermixture of both good and evil - right decisions and wrong decisions!

God is responsible for no 'evil' (motives and events). God is righteous and just and honest and loving. God tempts no man with evil, for God Himself is not evil. God cultivates in the life of a human (believer) the very 'traits' that God Himself enjoys.

God has a pure heart (pure and loving intent toward all humans), and His divine initiatives are never deceptive or plotting or scheming! Instead, His divine initiatives are motivated by holy love and kindness and graciousness and compassion!

Through the 'finished work' of Christ (death and resurrection), God is now 'reconciled' to the entire (rebellious) human race! God is not at 'war' with any human being, in spite of the fact that many persons have tragically chosen to be 'at war' with God!

God's loving arms of reconciliation are wide open, ready to receive any repentant sinner into His loving embrace! God is ready to forgive the most ugly sinner (the abortionist doctor, the terrorist, etc.), and God is ready to transform a 'bad' man into a 'good' man!

The point of this diversion (thoughts about God's love and holiness) is to emphasize two facts: (1) God hates sin and God is not the author of sin, because God is holy and righteous altogether. The origin of sin resides in the corrupt heart and the wrong choices of 'fallen humans'! Because God is a God who has 'two wills', evil is existent as a result of men wrongly exercising their 'human will' (their capacity to make moral decisions).

Unlike the Calvinists who believe that whatever happens on earth is an expression of God's (secret and hidden) will - including, of course, all the 'bad' things that happen on earth - those who hold the position of the New Testament believe that God's perfect will is the choice of goodness, but that, nevertheless, God permits free human beings to make decisions that are in direct opposition to the 'perfect will' of God!

Sin is in our world, not because God desired that there be sin in the world, but simply because God did not create 'robots'! God created persons who possess the frightening capability to say 'No' to God, rather than to say 'Yes' to God!

To reiterate the first reason for the diversion of thought regarding the wonder of God's love and holiness is to refute the Calvinistic teaching that all the evil events in the world are ultimately an expression of God's hidden (mysterious) will. The second reason for the diversion of thought regarding the wonder of God's love and holiness is to

affirm the fact that the devil-originated 'evil' in the world is all forgivable and redeemable because of God's wonderful grace!

The New Testament teachings make it clear that God did not 'will' evil in our world! Rather, evil originates in an 'evil power' (devil) who pushes men onto his 'evil side' (to think and to do wrong). God, all because of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross, is now able wonderfully to forgive every sinner of every sin, and to transform every sinner into a person who develops a character that is patterned after the very loving character of Jesus Christ!

This is the meaning of 'grace' - God, for Jesus' sake, treating sinners with the greatest of tenderness and compassion and mercy! In contrast to the viewpoint of Calvinism, the New Testament teaches that God intensely hates sin (actions that are contrary to God's perfect will), and that, although sin originates in Satan who uses humans as his 'instruments' to carry out his evil purposes, God is able and He is willing to forgive any sin (if the conditions are met to receive that gift of forgiveness)!

It is true, according to the Bible, that sometimes (for redemptive purposes) God chastens His straying people (Jews in the Old Testament and His modern-day drifting children). (Hebrews 12) Punishment sometimes comes from the hand of the Almighty One, and this punishment is so severe at times that some onlookers could call the judgments from God, as 'evil'. But to use that word in special contexts (of God's chastening actions towards his straying children), is different from using the same word in the context in which Satan is seeking to bring destruction to the sons of men! God's intent in sending 'suffering' (so-called 'evil') is very different than Satan's intent of bringing 'evil' to human beings! Satan seeks to destroy human beings, and God seeks to restore human beings!

God does not will 'evil', nor does He send 'evil' upon humans! God does not wield His 'rod of correction' for any reason other than for redemptive reasons. And even when believers are inflicted by Satan-sent 'evil' (like terrorism, like murder, like unjust imprisonment, like unjust suffering as in the case of Job), the mighty Spirit is present in the life of a believer, and the Spirit empowers the believer to use the 'evil' to bring ultimate profit (spiritually and otherwise) to the be-

liever!

Paul and Silas (in the New Testament) were unjustly treated (for their faith) - they were beaten and cast into prison, with hurtful stocks on their hands! But the Spirit enabled them to rejoice in God and to sing praises to God - in the middle of the night!

The 'evil' that Satan (through evil persecutors) brought into the life of these two men, was transformed into a victory! These men maintained their faith in God. God brought an earthquake which resulted in the freeing of the men from their chains. The jailer and his entire family, in fear and trembling and humility, all became believers on that very night!

What the devil meant for evil, God meant for good - for the salvation of an entire household! God did not 'will' the imprisonment of those believers (leaders), but, nevertheless, God used the 'Satan-motivated' event, to bring God's glory and for the benefit of others!

It is a harsh doctrine and an unbiblical position to posit only 'one will' to God! To declare that humans have not been given such a thing as a genuine 'free will', by which humans can actually help 'change the course of history', is to put all the 'burden of responsibility' for evil upon the shoulders of God!

To embrace the Calvinist understanding of God's nature and of God's activities is to embrace a picture of a God who finally must take the direct (or indirect) responsibility for all 'evil' actions! This picture of God, few 'average' persons (Calvinist persons) would affirm, and, yet, what other conclusion can be drawn, if it is true that humans have no genuine 'free will', and if God has only 'one will'?

If all that happens is an extension of the sovereign 'will' of God (of the mysterious purposes of God), and if man has no choice in any matter (since there is no such thing as an authentic 'free will'), the dreadful and the horrible conclusion must be drawn - namely, God is 'behind' all happenings that transpire on planet earth - including all 'evil' actions!

Calvinists believe that God is more powerful than Satan; therefore, God 'wills'(directly or indirectly) all the 'evil plots and evil tragedies'

that Satan perpetuates! Thus, while Satan is 'directly' responsible for many 'evil happenings', since God allows those 'evil happenings' from the hand of Satan, God 'indirectly' wills those Satan-motivated 'evil happenings'!

In light of all this 'reasoning' (regarding the Calvinist belief that God has only 'one will'), there are some 'sad' conclusions that must be drawn! From an honest investigation of Calvinism, one would have to draw the following 'sad' conclusion regarding God: God is ultimately responsible for the 'evil' happenings in our world!

If Satan's actions (of evil) are under the control of God (and are actually manifestations of God's 'one perfect will' for the world), then Satan's perpetuation of evil is, in reality, a manifestation of the 'hidden secrets and mysterious purposes' of God for the world!

With this dreadful understanding of God, Satan is an 'ally' of God, not an 'adversary' of God! God's hidden purpose and His divine will (His 'one will') supersedes the power of Satan, and, indeed, the exercise of the power of Satan (in perpetuating evil on the earth) is actually an indirect exercise of the power of God - an extension of the will of God, an ally to the mysterious purposes of God! Thus, Satan is an 'ally' to the will of God! Not an 'enemy' but an ally to God's purposes! The 'honor' of Calvinism!

Just think of what happens to our understanding of the 'will of man' and the responsibility of man, regarding the presence of evil in the world! Is a human being actually able to make right and wrong decisions within the moral realm of human existence?

If God has not enabled a human being to make a genuine and a free decision, in the presence of moral alternatives, then man cannot be held responsible for the presence of any 'evil' in the world!

A man may do an 'evil act', but that 'evil act' is an act that is 'willed' by Almighty God, as an extension of His unusual and strange and mysterious 'sovereign will'. After all, God has a 'hidden will' that no human can ever discover or unfold. God's ways are higher than our ways, as high as the heaven is above the earth, and so are His

thoughts compared to our human thoughts! Don't try to figure out God's purposes! God knows what He is doing, not you! So declares the Calvinists!

These are the 'frightening' thoughts of Calvinism, based on the premise of God's inscrutable ways, and God's hidden thoughts, and God's declared will (single 'perfect will') and God's predestination of some to be saved and others to be lost!

If man is not responsible for the presence of evil in the world (the killing of millions of aborted babies, the killing of Jews in Germany, etc.), then who is responsible? The devil? But through whom does the devil work? But man's choice to do evil acts is really the extension (manifestation) of the sovereign will (the 'one will') of Almighty God! Behind all human actions is the 'hand of the all controlling God', an expression of the inscrutable purposes of God (even though those purposes seem very strange to fallible human beings)! Thus declares the doctrine of Calvinism!

If God has only one will, and if everything that happens on earth, happens because God - the sovereign God - wills that it should happen, that means that any lower beings (humans and Satan) are simply 'instruments' to accomplish God's mysterious purposes on earth. Calvinistic thought!

To be more 'consistent' to the Calvinist system, if man has no ability, authentically, to choose to do wrong, then how can man be held responsible in any way for the presence of 'evil' in the world? How can Satan 'use' a human as his 'instrument' to choose to do evil, if God has not given the ability to man to genuinely choose between 'right' and 'wrong'?

Calvinists believe that, because God is all-powerful and is in 'control' of all things on earth, therefore, for Arminians to declare that humans actually have the power to make moral decisions which affect the 'outcome' of the world's destiny, God's sovereign sway over the world is reduced in some way by the free exercise of a man's 'free will'! God limits the exercise of His mighty power, to allow man to make choices which affect the condition of the world! Arminians believe in God-given 'Free Will'!

God is in 'total control', and to declare that man (through the exercise of his genuine 'free will') has any 'control' through the kind of moral decisions he makes, takes away some of the 'control' from Almighty God! This is what Calvinists assert regarding the guarding of God's control from any idea of man having genuine control (through the exercise of his 'free will!').

Man is 'nothing', and God is 'everything', therefore, man cannot freely choose between 'moral alternatives', the result of which 'affects the outcome of the world's future happenings'! Calvinists attribute all things that happen on the face of this earth (good and bad happenings) - directly or indirectly - to the sovereign control of God! Therefore, to suggest that 'puny man' can exercise some kind of 'control' (subordinate and secondary control) over the destiny of the world, is to engage in 'gross blasphemy' against God (it is to deny the total sovereign power of Almighty God)! This is what Calvinism asserts!

This reasoning is also used when Calvinists talk about the salvation of a person. The salvation of a person is totally in the hands of God, and man (the sinner) has no 'say' as to his salvation! In fact, those who are truly 'saved' are those who are already 'elected' to be saved (by God in eternity, before the foundation of the world) and the 'newly saved' person does not know if he is actually a member of the 'elect' of God, determined by God before the foundation of the world!

For a sinner to 'meet certain conditions' (confess, believe, accept Christ) is on the 'surface' alright, but, according to Calvinist theology, the meeting of conditions (for salvation) constitutes human (proud) 'works' - and 'works' are against 'grace' (all of God). God, according to Calvinism, 'selects' whom He chooses to be a member of His 'elect family'! Again, here is an example of the application of the 'sovereign power' of God - the power of God that is totally in 'control'.

Man, in becoming a Christian, and man (the sinner) in living in the world of sin - man is not at all in control! Man is really not responsi-

ble (not in control) in becoming a Christian (and even when he thinks he has accepted Christ, he doesn't really know if he is a member of the elect group that will eventually end up in heaven). The declaration of 'cold Calvinism'!

Further, since the man of the world (the sinner) has no genuine and authentic capacity to make moral decisions, he cannot really do wrong (for what the sinner thinks is the expression of his 'free will', is really only the outcome of the 'hand of God' which rests upon him, and which 'forces' him to do certain 'evil acts')!

God is in total control, and God has only 'one will', and, therefore, all that happens in the world (good and bad events) is an expression of God's perfect will (His 'one will')! If a man actually made moral decisions that were real and authentic decisions, one would have to declare (against the ideas of Calvinism) that God has a 'permissive will' as well as a 'perfect will'!

That is to say, Calvinism would have to acknowledge that God is not in total control of the earth, that God created a human being with the capacity to honestly choose between moral alternatives, that man (when he chooses wrongly) is guilty of sin and is responsible to make amends with both God and with his fellow human beings whom he has 'hurt' (because of his wrongdoing)!

God sometimes 'acts' unilaterally ('on His own independently'), but (according to the teaching of the Bible) God usually acts 'bilaterally' (in cooperation with man, with God's hope that man will exercise his will responsibly and rightly).

However, not only did Adam and Eve (created in God's image) choose wrongly (sinned grievously), but, even though God places great confidence in His creatures that they will cooperate with Him in doing righteous 'projects' throughout history, the fact of the matter is that many humans (like Adam and Eve) have chosen the 'wrong' course rather than the 'right' course.

Not only does one's sins cause great harm initially (at the first yielding to temptation), but sinful decisions have had ongoing (long term) consequences. If man can choose wrongly (because of the exercise of authentic 'free will'), then the one who chooses wrongly is directly

responsible for his/her sinful choice!

The New Testament picture of man is that man is able authentically to make moral decisions, and, if he commits sin as a result of his choice, sin has consequences, but also that sin (because of Christ's sacrifice) can be forgiven!

Against the teaching of Calvinism, the New Testament teaches that God has given to mankind considerable 'freedom' to decide his own destiny. The fact of this choice gift of 'freedom' (to every person) does not reduce God's power, does not surrender any of God's 'control' over His creation (mankind)!

God chose to limit His own 'control' over a 'portion' of His creation, when God created a creature (human) which has the ability to choose between moral alternatives. It is this wonderful, yet frightening, capacity (i.e., the ability to make authentic 'free will' choices) that makes humans unique (special) from all the other creatures of God's creation!

All other creatures, while they doubtless have some ability to 'think', they do not have the God-like ability to 'decide' between moral alternatives. The creatures of the 'field' live by instinct, whereas humans live by reason - the reason to contemplate and to decide between moral alternatives - between objective 'right' and 'wrong', between making decisions that bring honor to God or dishonor to God!

It was God who chose to 'surrender' some of His power, to enable humans to partner with the Almighty God, in the accomplishment of God's mission on earth! God (say the Arminian theologians) is so powerful that He was willing (from the beginning of time) to endow humans with the 'power of choice' (as in the case of Adam and Eve).

God could have created 'robots' (with absolutely no freedom) robots that would be under the total dominance of Almighty God. Instead (as the Bible teaches) God created 'human beings' with the capacity (power) to exercise the freedom of moral choosing (choosing to obey God or choosing to disobey God).

This New Testament picture of the relationship between God and Man is very different from the picture espoused by Calvinism (regard-

ing the same relationship)! Calvinism teaches that God is all-powerful, and that man has no authentic power at all, that God is in total control of what appears to be human 'free will'.

Calvinism teaches that man is under the total dominance of Almighty God, and that man has no power (ability) to make any 'independent' moral choices. Basically, from the viewpoint of Calvinism, man is a mere 'puppet', and God pulls all the 'strings', that is, God has total control of every human, and that all 'moral choices' that man makes are simply 'extensions' (manifestations) of the sovereign will of God (expressions of the 'hidden purposes' of Almighty God)!

Man, basically, is like a 'robot', for man cannot 'will' anything that is contrary to the all-controlling will of God (the 'perfect will' of God). This, of course, is the 'logic' of Calvinism, for Calvinism does not believe that God has a 'permissive will' - a will that allows 'free will' agents to choose a course of action that is contrary (opposed) to the good will of Almighty God!

What appears 'evil' to 'puny humans' is not 'evil' to the Almighty God! Abortion may appear to be 'evil' to humans (particularly to Christians), but God has a 'higher purpose' (a 'hidden purpose') to fulfill through every event on earth - even through so-called 'evil' events like abortion and the slaughter of Jews in the War of 1939-1945! Frightening ideas (doctrines) of Calvinism!

According to Calvinism, everything that happens on this planet is in some way fulfilling the 'higher purposes' of the Almighty and All-controlling God of the Universe. Even though what happens (evil events) will often defy the 'reason' of humans, these 'events' are under the control of God, and they are events that, from God's viewpoint, 'help fulfill His hidden purposes'!

No man (sinner) has any measure of 'control' that is 'independent' of God's 'total control'! God is the 'Master' of all things on the earth (for God made the world), and 'puny man' cannot claim to exercise any control (in decision-making) that is outside the total control of Almighty God. To believe otherwise (that is, to believe that man has the ability to exercise genuine 'free will' and, thus, be able to make decisions that are dishonoring to God), is to engage in blasphemy

against the power and the authority of the Living God! This is the 'dogmatic reasoning' of Calvinism.

If a human cannot exercise genuine 'free will', and if Satan's evil works are simply an extension of the hidden (mysterious) will of an all-powerful God, then this must mean that God (who has one sovereign will superseding the will of Satan and the 'pretended' will of puny humans) is ultimately responsible for the existence of sin in the world!

What we call the 'evil', perpetuated by Satan and also 'caused' by the wrong choices of humans, really must be the strange and the mysterious and the hidden 'will' of the unfathomable God! A horrible conclusion to draw but (logically) what other conclusion can be drawn from the teachings of Calvinism?

No practicing Calvinist would want to suggest such a terrifying conclusion, but the doctrine of Calvinism (regarding God's sovereign control of all things, and the expression of God's 'one will', with no such thing as a 'permissive will') - these 'basic doctrines' of Calvinism force one (reticently) to draw this conclusion (regarding the origin of sin).

If man is not responsible, because he has no ability to independently choose right from wrong, and if Satan's evil actions and will are simply an extension of the 'one will' of God, then who - other than God Himself - is ultimately responsible for sin? Needless to say, this way of thinking (regarding the nature and the will of Almighty God) is totally alien (foreign and contradictory) to the teaching of the New Testament!

Few lay persons (in the 'camp' of Calvinism) are aware of the theological implications of the doctrines that compose this different (frightening) way of thinking about God, and about Man, and about the origin of 'evil' (and so much more).

Calvinism, by positing the belief that God is all-powerful, sovereign, single-minded regarding His mysterious 'will' (one will), has made Satan His 'ally' instead of making Satan His total enemy!

Further, Calvinism has reduced a person to the level of a 'robot',

with no independent ability to exercise his own 'free will'! Again, Calvinism has made God the author of all evil (since all events, good and bad, are ultimately an extension of God's perfect will!).

This viewpoint makes God the author of all evil! Only if humans can commit evil acts, based upon humans' ability to freely choose evil, can we have a 'true picture' of reality in our world.

Either all the evil events in our world are caused by the invasion of Satan and the work of Satan through the use of humans to carry out his work, or the evil events of this world are the direct result of God's (mysterious) will, based on His sovereign 'control'!

The former viewpoint is grounded in the Biblical revelation of reality, and, in contrast, the latter viewpoint is a contrary viewpoint to the Biblical revelation! The Bible makes it clear that God can do no evil, that God is not the author of evil, that God is opposed to all evil (against Satan himself, and against evil that is present in the mind and in the actions of man).

If you choose to believe that God (the all-controlling, 'sovereign' God) brings everything to pass in this world (including all suffering), then you will eventually turn against such a 'God', and you will 'curse' that kind of 'God', and you will question why the Bible teaches that 'God is Love'!

The latter concept (the Calvinist concept) that, because God has only 'one will', therefore all things that happen (including the many bad things) is the expression of God's will - this concept (this Calvinistic view of God) is heretical, is blasphemous, is hurtful, is devilish, and is totally contrary to the biblical revelation of the God of love.

DOES GOD'S 'SAVING LOVE' INCLUDE EVERY PERSON?

The Bible reveals that, though God is just in His dealings with wicked persons, God is, nevertheless, loving and kind and compassionate, that God is involved with broken humanity. The Bible reveals that God loves all persons, without exception. God hates our sins, but God, nevertheless, loves every person, regardless of how wicked a

person might be.

This biblical revelation (i.e., God's universal love for mankind) is in contrast to the 'Calvinistic' view which declares that, before the foundation of the earth, the all-powerful sovereign God 'willed' to save a portion of mankind and to damn to hell the remainder of the world's persons, arbitrarily, without any 'input' from humans (i.e., without any exercise of human will or decision).

This dreadful conviction of Calvinism (the premise of the Calvinistic doctrinal system) is popularly known as 'Predestination'! I don't know of any more horrifying theological teaching than this startling teaching! God is totally arbitrary, unpredictable, and unjust in His treatment of the human race. Calvinism, as a result of this doctrine, cannot claim to 'serve' a God of Love! Rather, this God must be called a 'God of Hate'!

This horrendous view of human life and of human destiny is very close to the 'viewpoint' of Satan himself (regarding the hateful attitude that both the Calvinist 'God' and the 'Devil' have towards the human race). As one critic (an Arminian scholar) said, "The God of Calvinism wants most people to go to hell, whereas the devil wants all human beings to go to hell!"

If Calvinism believes that all events that transpire on earth (including the widespread incidence of human suffering) happen because the sovereign (all-controlling) God has 'willed' them to happen (including all suffering), then why should doctors try to alleviate suffering, why should medical researchers try to eliminate deadly diseases, why should rescue workers build houses for refugees (for orphans), why should Christians pray for the healing of the sick persons?

If God (the all-controlling God) has no 'permissive will', but only a 'perfect will', and if He has 'willed' everything that happens in this world (including all suffering and pain and misery and grief and tragedies and kidnaping and all wars and all concentration camps and all divorces and all accidents and all murders), then how is the 'will' of this kind of 'God' different from the 'will' of the Devil himself?

If God wills all suffering, then this 'God' is as different from the loving Jesus as night is different from day, as Churchill is different from

Hitler, as kindness is different from cruelty, as love is different from hatred, as the 'comforting Holy Spirit' is different from the 'legion of demons' in hell!

How could such a view of life (the Calvinistic view of life) ever become 'lodged' (ingrained) within the 'course of Church history'? How could any individual ever embrace the teachings of Calvinism? There must be many so-called Calvinists (occupying many pews in many churches) in our modern times who have no 'real understanding' of the premise of Calvinism (predestination) and the implications of this frightening theology!

IS JESUS A 'LOVING SAVIOR' OR A 'CRUEL MONSTER'?

This view of life (this particular theological persuasion) has had a 'strong foothold' in theology throughout the last several centuries, and even today some Christians will 'swear' by its precepts!

This system of thinking does great harm to the 'character of God'. It turns God into a virtual 'monster', because it teaches that God is One who is behind everything that happens on this earth (including suffering and evil decisions of sinful men)!

It teaches (horror of horrors) that God, the 'all-wise' One, 'justly' predestines (chooses) to bring some persons to heaven, and to send others (most?) to hell! There could be no more horrible theological doctrine than the doctrine of 'Predestination'!

Thousands of persons (throughout the centuries) have spent their life in terror and in dread and in total insecurity, while they wondered if they were included in God's 'select circle' whom He chose to go to heaven!

The sooner this unbiblical (manmade) doctrine (from St. Augustine and, more recently, from John Calvin) is expunged from the books of theology - the better, the better, the better!

This strange set of teachings, with the predestination premise, has brought confusion to the minds of many, and utter terror to the hearts of sincere souls who are taught that there is no assurance of salvation (that they must simply hope, at the time of their death, that they

were a member of the 'elect' of God)!

Never mind that these sincere souls have prayed the sinner's prayer, that they have prayed regularly, that they have sought to walk in the spirit of holiness, that they have reached out in love to their neighbors often, that they have saturated their mind with the study of God's Word! Never mind that the nine-fold 'fruit of the Spirit' is manifest in their life to all those around them! Never mind that they have faithfully attended their local church, for many years! No assurance of their eternal salvation, after all of these disciplined efforts to follow God! No assurance of eternal life in Calvinism!

If a person is living this type of disciplined and loving life, those observing Calvinists (including Calvinist preachers) would probably be quick to declare that such a person surely would have to be among God's 'elect circle' (a person chosen from the foundation of the world to be an 'elect child')!

Any observer would think so, but 'rigid and rugged' Calvinistic teaching declares that, while perseverance in the faith is likely an indication that one is in the 'inner circle' of the elect ones, a professing Christian cannot be 'absolutely assured' that, when his death comes, he will enter heaven!

According to Calvinism, the ultimate possession of eternal rest in heaven is based on God's 'electing purpose', not on the basis of one's personal commitment to Jesus Christ (and His 'finished work' on the cross and through the empty tomb). The mysterious purpose of God (God's arbitrary election in eternity, before the foundation of the world) - this is the basis for one's entrance into heaven!

The New Testament, in contrast to the strange and bizarre teachings of Calvinism, teaches that Jesus Christ is the only means by which all human beings can be saved! ALL, not SOME human beings can be saved. God predestined the entire human race to be saved, through the instrumentality of His Son.

God favored, not a few, but God favored the entire human race - fallen as it is! God is not willing that any person should perish, but that every soul (sinner) should repent and be saved (for time and for eternity)!

God loves everyone! Jesus' blood was shed for everyone! Everyone is savable (capable of being saved, because of the work of the Holy Spirit - drawing all to the living Christ for salvation)! The just-described statements (contrary to the beliefs of Calvinism) are strongly supported in the teachings of the New Testament!

Because of the strange Calvinistic interpretation of God's sovereignty and of God's mysterious purposes, there is no assurance given by God to mankind, regarding ultimate acceptance by God! On the other hand, the doctrine of personal assurance of salvation and assurance of eternal life (based on perseverance in the 'faith') - these teachings are so wonderfully and reassuringly taught in the New Testament!

Assurance, based on the believer's continued obedience, but, nevertheless, wonderful assurance! In Christianity, there are always conditions to be met, as well as promises to be claimed, but the promises (of assurance) are for the purpose of giving motivation and comfort. "Be thou faithful until death, and I will give thee a crown of life!"

Calvinism believes that everything which happens on this earth is an expression of the 'will' of the sovereign God. God is all-powerful; therefore, everything that happens on earth is a visible extension (expression) of God's invisible will. Even though we mere humans (fallible because we are members of a fallen race), cannot understand how evil things could be an expression of God's holy will, we humans must not question the 'wisdom' and the 'ways' of the living and the eternal and the all-wise God. These above-stated assertions express the belief of Calvinism!

God has His own (mysterious) ways of doing things, so who are we (weak and sinful mortals) to question the inscrutable (mysterious) ways of Almighty God? Even though our human minds cannot understand the 'ways of God', we humans must remember that 'God knows best'! Again, assertions of Calvinists!

Such 'reasoning' is riddled with falsehoods! To state that these erroneous ideas reflect God's wisdom is to do injustice to the Biblical concept of God! The wisdom of mere man is greater than the wisdom

of God (if what Calvinism says about God is true)! Mere man has a higher standard for 'justice' than what God does (if what Calvinism says about predestination is true)!

God, as understood by Calvinism, sends some (maybe most) human beings to hell, simply because such an action satisfies His (God's) mysterious purposes, and is according to His (God's) predestined 'perfect will'! And such arbitrary actions on the part of God actually bring (strangely) a type of 'glory' and 'honor' to Almighty God! What horrifying ideas to apply to God! Thankfully, this is not at all the New Testament picture (revelation) of the true God (the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ)!

What human being, in his right mind, could accept such a horrible doctrine, and who, in his right mind, would ever desire to serve such an unjust and arbitrary and cruel God?

In light of this horrible picture (of the Calvinist's view of God and of God's 'ways'), I personally would have to declare that this 'god' is very similar to the 'god' whose name is the 'Accuser of the brethren' (the 'god' who hates humanity)!

Calvinism defames the name of God. Calvinism ignores the loving character of Jesus Christ, who 'went about doing good' to humanity. Calvinism ignores the 'comforting role' of the Holy Spirit who is intent on helping all human beings, and who is intent on bringing comfort to all suffering persons, and whose mission is to persuade all persons to accept the living Christ and, thus, to go to heaven!

The God of Calvinism (unbelievably) is 'glorified' when some persons end up in hell (according to God's 'electing purposes')! In contrast to this horrifying portrait of God (as an arbitrary God who plays 'favorites' with mankind, and who is honored when some persons - as predestined - go to hell), the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has made provision (through Christ) for all persons to go to heaven - and He deeply desires that all repent and all follow Christ and enter heaven some glorious day!

The Calvinist God is glad that some (perhaps most) people go to hell! The Christian God (as revealed in the New Testament) has His arms wide open, and He appeals to everyone to take the yoke of love upon

him and to serve the living Christ joyfully! As one happy soul said to me (as she viewed Nature): "All of this, and heaven too!" Every soul can be a 'double winner', for time and for eternity!

ABUNDANT LIFE, HERE ON EARTH, AND ETERNAL LIFE SOMEDAY
IN HEAVEN. A 'DOUBLE WINNER'!

In spite of earth's trials, 'the best of earth', to be followed by God's best prepared gift in heaven! But these statements (as wonderful as they are, because they are based on the revelation of the New Testament) cannot be made by those who bow the knee to the cruel 'God of Calvinism'!

Calvinism believes that God is the author of all suffering (since all things that happen on the earth are an extension of the will of God). Calvinism is a great 'deterrent' to the ministries of healing by doctors and by other ministers of healing.

If suffering is the product of God's will (a part of God's inscrutable, mysterious purposes), then why should any human 'stand against' God's purpose? Why should a doctor attempt to heal a sick or diseased person, if God wants such a person ill?

If God wants such a person healed, then it is possible (probable) that God wants to use the doctor as God's instrument to accomplish that healing. But, if, instead, God wants someone ill, then the doctor can't 'fight' against God's mysterious will!

If God (according to Calvinism) has willed many persons (probably the majority of persons) to go to hell, it is logical to conclude that it is likely that God (whose purposes are beyond understanding) does not want most people healed (after all, most people are going to hell eventually!) These are horrifying ideas (repulsive to any one in their right mind), but these are the explicit teachings of Calvinism (with some practical implications to the doctrines).

If God wills the suffering of a cancer patient, then why would any doctor want to 'resist' God's purpose which 'wills' the suffering of someone? How vastly different are these 'heretical views' of Calvinists, from the sound and wonderful and encouraging and comforting 'views' regarding God's nature and regarding God's world, which are

clearly 'spelled out' in the Word of God (Bible)!

IS GOD'S OFFER OF FORGIVENESS FOR ALL OR FOR ONLY A FEW PERSONS?

According to the Bible, God is a God of love. He loves all persons. In spite of man's 'fall' into sin, God wants every person to be 'saved' - to enjoy an abundant life on earth and an eternal life hereafter. Because of mankind's 'historic fall', every person is a sinner, but God, through the coming and the sacrifice of Christ, has provided a means of salvation for every person.

Every person can enjoy the forgiveness of sin, and experience reconciliation with the Father of love. The Holy Spirit, sent by Jesus into the world, is here to uplift Christ, and to draw all persons to the Living Christ. The Spirit is the Comforter, and as such, the Comforter is in the world to 'comfort' everyone who sorrows and everyone who grieves because of great loss in his/her life!

God has a place prepared in heaven for every single person, and the Spirit is seeking (with the cooperation of every person) to prepare every person for his custom-made home in heaven! These statements, in brief summary, reflect the 'teachings' of the Bible, regarding the meaning of life, and the essence of God's love for every lost soul (including every suffering person).

SHOULD GOD BE BLAMED FOR ALL HUMAN SUFFERING?

We have shared (in generous fashion) the attitude that the God of the Bible has towards human suffering. All human suffering originates from the historic 'fall' of Adam and Eve (in the Garden of Eden). God is not the author of suffering.

Disobedience against God's moral law is the cause of much human suffering. When the 'federal head' of the human race fell from fellowship with God, there was a terrible consequence - the entire human race inherited the 'seeds of sin and suffering' from that 'federal head' (Adam)! As a horrible consequence, suffering spread to the entire human race. Christ is called the 'second Adam'!

Through the 'accomplishment' of Christ - his death and resurrection

- all mankind now are restored to fellowship with God and the entire human race is guaranteed a place in heaven. But, as wonderful as these 'gifts' (to humanity) are, these gifts (of new life on earth and eternal life in heaven) are not given to anyone who does not want these gifts.

It defies my reason, for instance, why any person would turn down his inheritance (in the earthly sense), and it defies my reason even more why anyone (any human being) would turn down his God-offered gift of new life on earth and eternal life in heaven.

What was lost for the human race, in the first Adam (in the Garden of Eden), is more than gained through the second Adam (Jesus Christ). We humans became sinners, as a result of the disobedience of the first Adam, but we humans (by repentance and by faith) can become 'healed and whole' because of the 'finished work' of Jesus Christ, who is called the 'Second Adam'. Through the First Adam, the entire human race lost fellowship with God, and the human race inherited so much from our 'federal head'.

We inherited a darkened mind and a weakened body. Ever since the historic 'fall', man's body is weak and the body is subject to sickness and to suffering and finally to death. Through the 2nd Adam (Jesus Christ), the entire human race received the forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life. Even though the 'original sin' left its continuing effects on the human body (which will inevitably turn to dust), the suffering of the human body is the object of Christ's concern.

***'FIRST ADAM' IS TOTAL LOSS, BUT 'SECOND ADAM'
IS TOTAL GAIN!***

There is no one more compassionate and there is no one who is more concerned to alleviate pain and to eliminate (sin-caused) disease, than the loving Savior! Jesus spent much of His earthly ministry healing the sick ones and comforting the suffering ones. When one traces the origin of suffering, it certainly does not go back to God. Sin, caused by human disobedience against God's explicit law (in the Garden of Eden), is the cause of all suffering.

Sin and suffering entered the world, not because God wanted this to happen or intended for this to happen. When our 'federal head' (the one who represented the human race) wrongly exercised his 'free will', the consequence for that willful disobedience was severe. Suffering (of all kinds) entered our world, and suffering has been in the world ever since that dreadful day when our 'federal head' (Adam) thought God did not mean what He commanded!

On the very day that our 'federal head' (Adam) partook of the 'forbidden fruit', the soul of mankind died, and the body was no longer strong and heaven-like in appearance and in capabilities! The body became weak and it became subject to disease and to tremendous suffering, of all kinds.

The salvation of our souls (the health of our souls) can become a reality, while we live on this earth, but (as the remaining consequence of the historic fall) we humans will have the challenges of physical (and mental) illness to deal with, all the remaining days of our earthly existence!

The benefits of God's grace always guarantees spiritual healing, and that type of healing (of the spirit) can happen often and soon (depending upon the preparation of the soul for the entry of the Lord into the human heart). But, while it is proper to do all that we humans can do to alleviate pain and to eliminate diseases, we all know that each of us humans will someday physically die. Dust we are and unto dust we shall return.

The hope of Christianity is that God loves all persons, Christ died for all persons, every person is capable of being forgiven of sins and of enjoying 'rich fellowship' with God and with others, the Comforter will help us as we deal with multiple problems and suffering on this planet, and, wonderfully, God has a place prepared in heaven for every one of us. God is not willing that any should perish, but that all persons should repent, and make heaven someday his eternal home!

***DID GOD 'CHOOSE' TO SAVE ONLY SOME PERSONS
OR ALL PERSONS!***

What is your personal 'response' to the two following scriptural ref-

erences? (1) *"God is not willing that any should perish, and God is giving more time for sinners to repent."* (2 Peter 3:9) (2) *"This is good and pleases God our Savior, for He longs for all to be saved and to understand this truth: That God is on one side and all the people on the other side, and Christ Jesus, himself man, is between them to bring them together, by giving his life for all mankind."* (1 Timothy 2:3-5).

You cannot have it 'both ways'! Either God loves all persons and He wants all persons to repent and to be 'saved' OR God does not actually love all persons and God does not want all persons to repent and to be 'saved'.

If you have a 'warm approval' of the 'universal viewpoint' (i.e., that all persons are savable' - though not automatically 'saved'), then you must 'repudiate' (reject) the 'narrow view' of God's love and of His offer of the 'salvation gift'! This latter view regarding God's selection of only certain persons to be 'saved' and to go to heaven - this restrictive view is called 'Calvinism'.

There are 'several points' to this 'belief system', but Predestination is the basic Calvinistic 'premise' for all the other 'sequential points'. Here, I center on the 'premise' of this 'iron-cast' doctrinal system.

Frank Schaeffer, respected writer and church leader (the son of the well-known writer and philosopher, Francis Schaeffer) departed from this 'doctrinal camp' with great abandon when he could no longer accept a view of God's will (purpose) which he strongly believed contradicted the 'picture' of God (Jesus) revealed in the New Testament.

He registered a strong 'outcry' (defiance) against the doctrine of Calvinism (a position which he for years had believed). Here is what he wrote: "The Calvinist 'God' was a great unfathomable Zeus-like computer in the sky who arbitrarily saved some while damning others - an irrational perhaps berserk Augustinian phenomenon no more loving or predictable than a forest fire. The 'God' of Calvinism emerged as inexplicably less merciful than most of his human creatures.

"God's choice of certain individuals unto salvation, before the foundation of the world, rests solely in His sovereign will. His choice of certain individual sinners to be saved is not based on any criterion

that is humanly knowable. Election, therefore, is not determined by or conditioned upon, what a man will do. On the contrary, God gives faith to individuals He selects. God's choice of the sinner, not the sinner's choice to follow Christ, is the only cause of salvation. This must be so since humanity has no capacity to choose since the will and the intellect is utterly depraved."

Calvinistic Predestination Repudiates Man's Free Will - The Bible teaches that, even though God is sovereign (all-powerful), God chose to allow every person freely to choose either to accept or to reject God's gift of forgiveness and eternal life.

Calvinistic Predestination Violates God's Justice - Any sensitive and honest person would quickly conclude that, for God to predestinate any person to eternal damnation (independent of that person's 'free will choice') would be an act of 'greatest injustice'.

It is 'harsh' to say, but I must, nevertheless, say that I don't see much difference between the 'God' of Calvinism, and the 'Devil' himself. The only difference is this: The 'former' wants (wills) MOST of the human race to go to hell; the latter (devil) wants EVERYONE To Go to Hell! The 'God' of Calvinism is NOT the God of the New Testament!

Calvinistic Predestination Is a Denial of God's Love And His Mercy - The 'true God' (of the New Testament) is pictured like a 'Good Shepherd' in pursuit of ALL of His 'lost sheep'! The true God is like a Father who waits patiently for His Prodigal son to come home to His loving embrace. Remember: God loves ALL, God wants to save ALL, Christ died for ALL, and the Holy Spirit calls ALL! How wide is God's mercy? "God so loved the entire world" - including YOU!

*YOUR 'VIEW' OF GOD DETERMINES YOUR 'VIEW'
OF MANKIND!*

The Calvinistic view of God (that God has only 'one will' and that, therefore, God is responsible for every wicked happening on the face of the earth) - this strange and tragic view of reality is totally 'false'. The 'sooner the better' for this viewpoint to be eliminated from the face of the earth and from the pages of some theology books.

Calvinism is a view of God and of God's sovereignty that defames God's character, and that communicates great misunderstanding regarding God's purposes for mankind. Imagine a minister (who holds this sad view of God - that God has only 'one will') entering the hospital room of one of his parishioners.

If he were honest (with his 'Calvinistic' belief that God wills and that God desires the presence of sickness in our world), he would have to say to his church member: "I am sorry that you have been diagnosed with this 4th stage cancer, but you know that everything that happens in our evil world is really the 'will' of our sovereign God. You know, dear soul, that God is in total control in this world. You know that all pain and all suffering and all events in this world are simply the unfolding of God's amazing and sometimes 'mysterious' will, and you know that we must not question the presence of any evil in our world, for the presence of evil (including all suffering) is an expression of God's inscrutable purposes. The presence of evil in our world may seem terrible, and your illness may seem unpleasant, but just remember that your suffering (you're dying of cancer) originated from God, and is, indeed, God's will for you."

The latter conversation by a minister (of the Calvinist persuasion) may not be this 'blunt', but those who adhere to this type of theology would be 'thinking' these above words, even if he did not have the 'heart' to verbalize the words!

WHY DOES GOD PERMIT HUMAN BEINGS TO CHOOSE 'EVIL'?

God has allowed a choice between good and evil, and God allows terrible events to happen in our world (like abortion and like the German concentration camps). The sovereign God (though very powerful), nevertheless, allows the exercise of genuine human 'free will'. The fact that man can choose wrongly, demonstrates the fact that God has a 'permissive will' as well as a 'perfect will'.

God wants all persons to accept Christ and to live a holy life (perfect will), but God permits (allows) persons stubbornly to 'do their own thing' (to live a selfish life). Because people choose wrongly when 'moral alternatives' are presented them - this well-known and obvi-

ous fact strongly argues for the contention that God has, indeed, a 'permissive will', as well as a 'perfect will'.

All kinds of mental and theological problems develop when one rejects the reality of a 'permissive will' in the character of Almighty God! God, indeed, is sovereign, but God (whose power will ultimately and totally be manifest at the 'end of this age'), this God does not, in the 'name of His power', destroy the operation of human 'free will', during this 'present age' when human testing is necessary to determine the 'state' of each person's final judgment (in eternity).

Through God's testing (which requires the genuine operation of 'free will'), each person (depending on the outcome of the 'testing') either prepares himself for a wonderful future, or prepares himself for a tragic future! But all of this (man's testing that prepares him for a glorious future or for a destructive future), is based on the fact that God has a 'permissive will' - that is, God allows man the ability to genuinely choose between 'moral alternatives'!

God wishes the best (perfect will), but He allows the worst (permissive will). If God (according to 'Calvinist theology') has 'total control' of human life (sovereignty), then this means that all 'terrible' (evil) things that happen on this earth are things that 'fit into God's plan' and are a part of 'God's will'! All suffering, according to this Calvinistic idea (the idea that God is sovereign and that He has only 'one will'), happens because it is a part of 'God's plan'!

Therefore, according to Calvinism, all suffering is 'good and acceptable and purposeful' to Almighty God. This 'Calvinistic view' of life declares that, because God has only 'one will' (i.e., that all things that happen are according to the eternal will of God), therefore, God does not oppose human suffering, but, instead, God supports human suffering - for (according to this view of life) whatever happens on earth is part of God's perfect will.

What a sad and fatalistic view of life! Who would desire to serve a God who does not 'will' the destruction of disease and the elimination of all suffering? If human suffering is in some way a (mysterious) element in the over-all 'will and hidden purpose' of a sovereign God, then why should humans (doctors, etc.) fight to conquer human pain

and devastating diseases (particularly in 'third world countries' where disease is rampant)?

This concept of God is not the concept of the God of the New Testament, where God (through the hands of Jesus) went about healing all kinds of human afflictions! God has never 'willed' human suffering! God hates the presence of disease (the result of the original 'fall' of man, Genesis 2), and God, directly through instantaneous healing, or indirectly through medical persons, is seeking to eliminate human devastation (suffering and pain)!

How merciless is a God (the God of Calvinism) who wills the presence of suffering in human bodies (all because God gets 'glory' from that suffering, a prelude to the glory that God will eventually enjoy - when human beings are finally 'cast into hell' because of God's predestinated 'will')! It is horrifying to even contemplate such a 'devilish' God! This kind of 'God' is almost as horrible as the 'Devil' himself! The God of the New Testament, in contrast to the 'God' of Calvinism, wills that every human being (through repentance and faith) make heaven his eternal home!

The God of the New Testament is like a father who loves his prodigal son, and who waits for the return of his son from sin, and, who, after the son's return, welcomes the son back 'home' with open arms!

Or, the true 'God' is like the 'good shepherd' who travels far and wide into the rugged wilderness, to rescue his lost sheep from sure disaster. He leaves the ninety-nine other sheep, and he expresses his undying and personalized love for the one unworthy, straying sheep. How personable is God's love for every lost soul! The 'good shepherd' is 'Good', not cruel (like the God of Calvinism)!

DOES GOD HAVE ONE 'WILL' OR TWO 'WILLS'

The opposing view of reality (as it relates to God's attitude towards 'human suffering') is the 'Arminian view' of life. This view embraces God's sovereignty - that God is ultimately 'in charge of life' - but this view believes that God has allowed humans to exercise 'genuine human freedom'. Much (certainly not all) of the 'human suffering' is the consequence of wrong moral choice by humans. Those persons,

who accept the Arminian viewpoint, regarding God's way of working with humans, believe that God has 'two wills'.

God has a 'perfect will' for mankind (the way of righteousness and holy living), but God also has a 'permissive will' - based on the reality of God's creation of humans with a 'free will'. In other words, God allows man to choose evil rather than to choose good, to choose to kill babies rather than to let them live, to choose to eliminate Jews in a 'gas oven' rather than to honor this race of people!

God permits a person to choose to climb a dangerous mountain and to have an accident, rather than to use 'common sense' and to decide to stay home on a wintry day! God permits a person to choose to refrain from drinking alcohol while driving rather than to become drunk while behind 'the wheel' and hit an innocent bystander along the road! God permits a person to choose to live near the ocean where hurricanes frequently hit, and consequently to have his house washed away by the tidal waves! God permits a person to choose to refuse the wise advice of parents, and instead to choose to marry a 'loser' and end up with a tragic divorce.

Every human being is created with the ability to choose between moral alternatives - to choose the 'right' and to refuse the 'wrong', to choose the 'way of wisdom' and to reject the 'way of folly'! Human beings are not 'robots', controlled by a sovereign 'God' who uses them as 'mere tools' to carry out some kind of mysterious divine purpose!

Rather, human beings are created in the 'image of God', with an inner desire to serve their Creator, but, nevertheless, (because of the 'inward bent to sin') humans also experience an inner desire to become autonomous (self-directed) rather than to become God-directed. Each person experiences an 'inner conflict', an inner 'pull' towards the God who created him, and also, at the same time, an inner 'pull' (because of his 'fallen nature') to 'move away from God' and to live an independent life!

How a person resolves this 'terrible inner struggle' (listening to the voice of God or listening to the voice of one's self) will determine the 'outcome' of a person's life! There is the voice of the Spirit (con-

victing and drawing a person to Christ), and there is also the voice of selfishness that draws a person away from God and that seeks (deceptively) to lull and to entice a person to 'taste the carnal fruit of the world' (satisfaction of fleshly appetites)!

Both God (the Holy Spirit) and the sinful world seek the allegiance of the soul of a person. These are the two opposite 'pulls' - the pull of the Spirit (prevenient grace - or the 'grace that goes before' to make it possible for a sinner to be saved), and the pull of the world (which seeks to exploit the fallen and lustful nature of the unconverted person).

This description of the struggle which every human experiences (as he is in the 'valley of decision') describes the reality of the human 'free will'! God will, through the Spirit, seek to persuade the sinner (without coercion) to 'come over on the side of righteousness and holiness' - through man's repentance and through the Spirit's transforming power - but, in the 'final analysis', each person must exercise his own power of 'free will choice'!

The Holy Spirit offers the gift of repentance and the gift of faith to every person (this twofold gift is called 'prevenient grace'), but every person (sinner) must either accept or reject this twofold gift of the Spirit.

To reject God's prevenient grace is to 'shut the door of invitation' to God's 'saving grace' (the grace that converts one from sin to salvation). There is no 'movement' towards God without the initiating overtures (prevenient grace) of God.

All of salvation is the work of God - the grace that initially draws a sinner to God (prevenient grace), the grace that saves a sinner (saving grace), the grace that cleanses a believer (sanctifying grace), the grace that sustains a believer throughout his 'faith journey' (keeping grace), the grace that restores a wandering believer (restoring grace), the grace that empowers a believer when he comes to the end of his life (dying grace)!

Neither Satan (nor the evil world) nor God (through the Spirit) can

'force' a human being to 'make up his mind' (to make a choice) - for 'good' or for 'evil'! The influence from both the 'evil side' and the 'good side' may be strong, but, ultimately, each man must choose whom he will serve - the true God or the Baal (pagan gods)!

And then, with the moral choice, each person must live with the consequences of his choice! The 'consequences' of a person's choice come with the kind of choice that he makes. The original choice God has finally left to each person, but the consequences (good or bad) are 'attached' to the original choice. The consequences are part of the 'package', tied with the original choice!

As an example, you are free to regularly partake of a 'hard drug', but you do not have the freedom to choose the devastating consequences when you partake of the 'hard drug'. I had a good friend who, even though he became a Christian, chose not to give up smoking. He continued to smoke for ten years after he became a Christian. Just before he died (of cancer, probably caused by smoking) he told me that he wished that he had stopped smoking many years earlier! He was fairly young when he died - a wonderful Christian man, but a man whose body was, nevertheless, devastated by the effects of cigarettes!

Whereas Calvinism thinks that the so-called exercise of human 'free will' is simply a mechanism (extension) of the divine (hidden) will of Almighty God (and, therefore, rather insignificant, because 'free will' is not an independent feature of humans), those Christians of the Arminian persuasion believe (like the New Testament) that 'human free will' is a sacred and a serious feature (characteristic) of what it means to be human!

In other words, Arminians believe that 'free will' was given by God to the human race, at the time of God's creation of Adam and Eve (and that this property is an integral characteristic of every human being!). Arminians believe (like the Bible teaches) that human free will (while not outside of God's ultimate control) is a gracious 'gift' given by the Creator. The exercise of the free will of humans (while definitely influenced by the loving God) has the power to bring a person to Christ, or it has the power to take a person away from Christ!

*WRONG MORAL CHOICES HAVE TRAGIC MORAL
CONSEQUENCES!*

Against the advice of the Bible and against the wise counsel of godly leaders and against one's own "better sense", people (even believers) exercise their 'will' negatively, and God (because He honors the sanctify of the human will) permits persons to 'make their foolish choice' (oftentimes with sad and painful consequences). Because God did not create 'robots', but, instead, He created persons who possess the wonderful, but the frightening, capacity to 'choose between moral alternatives', a lot of 'human suffering' happens!

A lot of suffering in our world today is the result of 'free will agents' making 'wrong moral choices'! When persons are 'wallowing in the ditch of suffering', with no one to blame but themselves, does Jesus care for these persons?

I will refer to myself, as an example: When I was 'existing' (not really 'living') in the "dark tunnel of painful depression" (1992-1994) - suffering as a consequence of my 'wrong attitudes' of resentment and anger and bitterness and worry - did God have a 'right' to condemn me to continuing perpetual suffering and agony and loneliness and sterile living?

Because of my own wrong 'moral decisions' (i.e., because I broke God's laws of love and forgiveness), I deserved God's condemnation, I deserved to feel the pain of God's judgment! God gave me what I needed, namely, chastisement and correction and the pain that brought me to needed 'humility' and greater trust in God! But God did not give me what I deserved, namely, harsh justice and judgment.

During my many failures and my sins, this sadly brought me into a long period of 30 months of 'depression', accompanied with intense pain and suffering (nearly to the 'breaking point' of my endurance). God was with me each moment of each long day.

Admittedly, I often did not 'feel' His presence, but, nevertheless, He never left me to myself, to endure the pain - the suffering that I had largely brought upon myself. The 'unseen' and the 'unfelt' presence of my merciful Savior and my conquering Lord was with me, during

the 'dark' traversing of that 'long and dark tunnel'.

This most difficult (agonizing) period of my life was a time that brought much confusion to my mind, and it brought a crushing to my spirit and it brought a trembling to my heart, and it brought a weakness to my body. My words are inadequate to describe the soul-wrenching pain I experienced for so very long! A nightmare!

There may be some trials that are more difficult than the trial of 'depression', but, from my personal experience, I think 'depression' has to be 'near the top' of a list of 'hard trials'. The suffering that is the result of depression is a suffering that encompasses one's entire being - body, soul, spirit, heart, and mind! I, frankly, wanted to die, and I made that my prayer for months!

In surveying the various kinds of suffering, I think it is accurate to state that many sufferings which we humans experience are due to the consequences of our own 'wrong moral choices'. Probably much of the suffering in our world today could have been prevented, if right choices would have been made. I made some wrong moral choices – with painful consequences! The darkest months of my life (at least 30 months)! Eventually, God brought total healing to my total being!

**THE MYSTERY OF ALL HUMAN SUFFERING HAS NEVER
BEEN SOLVED!**

However, after the above-stated insights have been acknowledged, in all honesty we must admit that there is a 'ton of suffering' that seems to be the result of accidents, or unforeseen calamities, or the devastations from natural disasters, or the result of the invasion of diseases, or injuries caused from wars, or the crushing emotional pain that comes as a result of an unfaithful spouse. And more and more!

I believe in God's sovereignty (i.e., that God has 'control' of the events of men), but I do not believe that God 'controls' the events of life, at 'the expense of sacrificing the genuine exercise of man's free will! God could easily have created a world in which He had total control, and where humans had no ability to genuinely exercise 'free will'. But, when God created man 'in His own image', God created a 'being' who could (frighteningly) say 'No' as well as 'Yes' to the will

of God. In other words, God allowed a human creature to choose to disobey the command of the Creator. The condition of the world (good and bad) is largely the result of the kinds of moral choices that humans have made (in the past and in the present time)!

The Bible (sadly) reports that that is exactly what Adam and Eve did. They exercised their genuine 'free will' negatively. God made it clear that, although humans (made in God's image) could genuinely 'choose' between moral alternatives, man (the moral creature) could not decide on the results of right choice and he could not choose the consequences of wrong choice. That is an integral part of the 'moral package'! Man cannot choose the positive results or the negative consequences of his moral choosing! Those belong alone to God!

What happens after man makes his choice lies alone in the hand of God - the sovereign God. Even though man has a lot of freedom (to choose between moral alternatives), man does not have control of the final outcome (on an individual basis, as in the 'case' of David who reaped dreadful 'fruit' from his major moral failure; and on a national basis, as in the case of the 'fall of Israel' which went into foreign exile for 70 years). God is in sole control of the kind of positive results or negative consequences that come to every life!

WHEN DOES GOD INFLICT PUNISHMENT ON HUMAN BEINGS?

God brings punishment when God chooses to bring punishment - for redemptive purposes, as in the individual 'case' of David, and as in the 'case' of Israel when God's chosen people went into exile. Or to share with you, when I was brought into a 'tunnel of depression' for nearly 3 years. In these three 'situations' (whether personally or whether nationally) God's controls the 'natural consequences' for wrong 'moral decisions'. His purpose is remedial and redemptive, not vindictive or destructive! The saying is, "We live and we learn!"

It was God's intention, when I entered the 'dark tunnel of depression', to humble me, to chasten me, to teach me, to cleanse me, to give me a more mature perspective on life, to enable me to be more accepting of eternal values rather than being so focused on the

temporal importance of 'building a local church', to heighten my appreciation for the kindness of my caring wife who supported me so nobly through this painful ordeal, to enable me to be more empathetic towards fellow sufferers who are also experiencing heaviness of heart and crushing of spirit!

When I sinned, God did not give me what I deserved, namely, justice. Rather, God gave me what I so desperately needed, namely, mercy and compassion and love and understanding and companionship and forgiveness and healing!

It is true that much of the suffering in the world can be explained and understood. That is to say, much suffering is the outgrowth (consequence) of 'wrong moral choice'. "The gift of God is eternal life, but the wages of sin is death." While it is (sadly) true that the wages that sinners will have to pay for the sins which they never repent of, is eternal death (and only God, of course, understands the 'horror' of that punishment), it should be clear (from careful observation) that the 'wages' that sin pays, includes losses in this earthly existence, as well as losses in the place of eternal death!

The wages (consequences) of sin are clearly outlined (listed) within the pages of Holy Scripture. Many different chapters in the Bible list those 'wages' (consequences) of a sinful lifestyle (see Romans 1).

*ARE ALL SO-CALLED PREMATURE DEATHS ACTUALLY
GOD'S 'WILL'?*

Those persons (Christians) who adhere to the Calvinist teaching (i.e., that God has only 'one will') apparently do not believe that there is such a thing as a 'premature death'. If whatever happens on this planet is (according to this strange way of thinking) God's will (because God is sovereign), then, as horrible as this sounds, apparently all abortions are a part of God's master plan, compatible with God's sovereign purposes! All young persons who die in a car accident die because the accident is God's will! This is the Calvinistic way of thinking!

The practical application of this doctrine of God can be briefly stated as follows: God has only 'one will', God is in total control of the

world, man does not have any 'genuine free will', even though man thinks he is exercising genuine 'free will' in the 'moral realm', the choices that a man makes as a result of exercising his 'free will' are choices that God predetermined that a man should make, and those choices are merely the expressions of what God desired (as a part of His master plan for the world).

Thus, there is no such thing as independent choices by any persons, for God 'controls' every decision that every man makes. No man can make a choice that is opposite to or contrary to the 'perfect will' of God. God totally controls human decisions, and even so-called 'evil' choices that lead to evil events are part of God's perfect will, for God has an inscrutable (mysterious) purpose for everything, even so-called evil happenings and human sufferings. Again, a Calvinistic way of viewing all of life!

Finite human beings, who sometimes question God's seeming unjust ways, need to submit to God's ways, even if God's ways go counter to man's understanding of what constitutes 'justice' and 'integrity' and 'righteousness'! This is what Calvinists are required to think!

*DOES GOD TREAT EVERY PERSON JUSTLY OR ONLY
SOME PERSONS JUSTLY?*

With the kind of 'God' that Calvinism promotes, why wouldn't any honest person protest against such a 'devilish' picture of 'God'? This kind of God resembles the vengeful gods of Greek mythology! The common man (even the non-Christian) has a higher standard for justice, a greater sense of compassion, a greater understanding of freedom, than the Calvinistic-type of God who is supposedly inscrutable, sovereign, and righteous and just!

The God of the New Testament is just and merciful and loving (committed to the salvation of all persons, not arbitrarily selective as to whom He predestines to go to heaven and to whom He predestines will go to hell).

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ calls all to repentance and to faith, and He gives every person the freedom (genuine freedom) to choose to accept or to reject the new life that is offered to

all persons.

The true God (revealed clearly in Jesus Christ) has a love that extends to all, has a gift of life that is universally offered to every person, has a profound respect for the capability of every person to exercise his/her own 'free will' (authentically), has an ongoing involvement in the struggles and the sufferings of every person, without favoritism. This compassionate ministry (with various dimensions) is implemented by the 'hovering ministry' of love which the Holy Spirit personalizes in the life of every (willing) human being!

*WHAT IS GOD'S RELATIONSHIP TO MANKIND,
ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE?*

The Christian view of God is most attractive, whereas the Calvinistic view of God is most repulsive! The latter view is doctrinally heretical, and it is definitely unbiblical! Unfortunately, there is a large group of Christians who call themselves 'Calvinists', and it is doubtful that most of these precious folks realize the serious 'implications' of this doctrinal system! None of us (believers) know everything that we would like to know about God. "God's thoughts are higher than man's thoughts, as high as the heavens are above the earth!"

There is no place in our life for dogmatism when we are seeking understanding regarding the ways and the thoughts of God, but, on the other hand, there is a place for believers to declare certain facts about God. God loves everyone. God has granted humans the capability of making (genuine) choices ('free will').

God is not the author of sin or of suffering. God has both a 'perfect will' and a 'permissive will'. God does not arbitrarily choose some humans to be saved and some humans to be lost eternally (with humans having no 'decision power' to choose their eternal destiny). Further, God calls every person (sinner) to repentance and to trust in Christ, and God is doing everything possible (short of coercion) to 'get every person into heaven' where God has a special place prepared for all persons!

*DO HUMAN BEINGS HAVE THE ABILITY TO EXERCISE THEIR
'FREE WILL'?*

In contrast to the God that is revealed in the New Testament, Calvinists declare that God has only 'one will', and that humans do not have any ability to make any moral choice that is contrary to God's will and God's inscrutable purposes! This concept of God's 'total control' eliminates any possibility of humans exercising their 'free will' to make any decisions that would not 'fit into God's master plan'.

Those persons of the Calvinist persuasion believe that God is all-mighty, and man is essentially a 'mere instrument' in the hands of God for God to use as He chooses. Man does not have any genuine freedom, for all human decisions are totally orchestrated by the all-mighty power of God (whose ways cannot be understood, and whose ways must never be questioned by inquiring 'skeptics!').

Further, according to those of the Calvinist persuasion, a man has no ability, independent of God's perfect will, to actually and honestly and authentically choose between moral alternatives. God, as sovereign, has total control of the world; therefore man cannot do anything (in terms of free choice) that can 'go against' God's perfect will and God's sovereign purposes! But, according to that way of thinking, it is obvious, because of widespread evil in the world that God must be in favor of the existence of this widespread evil! A sad conclusion to come to, and certainly an unbiblical concept!

*IS GOD ULTIMATELY RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL THE 'EVIL' IN
THIS WORLD?*

According to this teaching, if it is true that all that happens in the world is the manifestation of God's 'perfect will', one would have to (logically) conclude that 'gross iniquities' and widespread evil fit into God's perfect scheme of things (His ultimate purposes). All that happens (good events and bad events) are all visible manifestations (expressions) of God's 'perfect will'.

Remember: The God of Calvinism does not have a 'permissive will' - for that, apparently, would be a travesty (blasphemy) to God's 'solid character' and His inflexible will. To suggest that man has a genuine

'free will' would be an attack on God's sole independence (i.e., God's total power). To suggest that man can actually (without the overpowering control of God) freely choose between moral alternatives, would be to have an unholy attitude toward God - a proud attitude - that would do dishonor to the sovereignty of the Almighty God! So declares the Calvinist thinker!

The Bible makes it very clear that God is not the author of evil. God has a 'perfect will' (that all should choose rightly and become followers of Christ). However, God also has a 'permissive will' (a second will) which allows God-created humans to 'freely choose' between 'moral alternatives', and to often choose evil rather than good!

Tragically, every person has the capability to choose to do evil, to disobey the laws of God, to defy the authority of Almighty God! Because God has a 'permissive will', God cannot force any person to follow the 'path of righteousness'!

The evil in our world originates with Satan, who, with the consent of human beings, brings evil into the world through the instrumentality of 'free will' agents! Because God profoundly respects the human creatures that He has made, God Himself cannot overpower and coerce anyone to eschew evil and cling to the good!

God took a 'risk' when He created 'free will' agents (creatures with the capacity to make good things happen or bad things happen in His world). At the beginning of time, a horribly wrong decision was made (by our first parents), and ever since that ancient time 'God-created' beings have been making the wrong and devastating choices!

Right choices bring good results (if not in time, certainly in eternity). Wrong choices bring bad consequences (suffering because of violation of God's moral laws). As noted above, God cares deeply for persons who are presently suffering, because they made wrong choices. God uses the suffering in a redemptive way, to bring these suffering ones to a closer fellowship with God.

In light of the Biblical Insights, I think it is definitely time to abandon Calvinism.

*Booklets From
"Biblical Foundation for the Sanctity Of Human Life!"*

WHO CARES FOR THE UNBORN BABY!

*Part I - "Biblical Foundation For The Sanctity Of
Human Life!"*

Part II - "Exposing Our Nation's Silent Holocaust!"

LET MY PRAISES BE HEARD!

LET MY TEARS FLOW!

LET MY LAUGHTER RESOUND!

DOES GOD LOVE ALL OR ONLY SOME?

BATTLE AGAINST HUMANISM!