

# The Founders Journal



Committed to historic Baptist principles

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# Literature—Including this Issue—Matters

*Tom J. Nettles*

In 1871 Spurgeon wrote in his editorial for *The Sword and the Trowel*, “We should be very greatly obliged if our readers would endeavour to increase the circulation of this magazine. Our work upon it is never light, and therefore we should be glad to have double our present constituency, and we might have it at once, with a little exertion from each subscriber. . . . Our area for doing good would be so much the larger if our readers were twice as numerous. If we have ministered unto edification of some, it is our duty to wish to be useful to more, and equally the duty of those benefitted to assist us in so doing.”

So it is with us. Every subscriber could with a little effort induce one other person to subscribe. None of us would object to the subscription being increased because the production of an issue takes the same amount of work no matter how small or large the subscription. Since the writing of Moses, the prophets, and the apostles, literature, the written word, has proved to be vital for the propagation of the gospel of Christ. We certainly claim no divine inspiration; and we claim none for Augustine, Luther, Calvin, the Puritans, or the Baptist worthies. We do, however, believe that the principle of argument for ideas, advance of the truth, and preservation of thought through the written word is a God-idea, an extension of Christian proclamation and a manifestation of Christian apologetics. In this way ideas may be present where the acerbic aspects of personality do not detract, or may more easily be overlooked so that content eventually rises to the top and the superfluous dissipates. If you think that worthy ideas have been communicated and a distinctive approach to truth and ministry has been promoted in these pages through the years, then help with their profusion by giving a gift subscription or encouraging a friend or pastor or family member to subscribe.

This issue is devoted to interaction with a book that advocates a theology for Baptists that minimizes, or rejects, historic confessional Calvinism. Kenneth Keathley, who spoke at the “Building Bridges” conference in November of 2007, has written a defense of Molinism as a viable option to Calvinism as a way of framing *Salvation and Sovereignty*, the title of his book. I have sought to engage this thorough and robust proposal with the seriousness it deserves in the space permitted.

Many times denominational life becomes cluttered, necessarily so, with discussion of organizational structures, delivery models, ministry leadership, financial arrangements and entity relations. We should do that, but not leave the compelling matters of theological weighing and sifting undone. A tightly structured and efficient delivery system becomes an evil if it is in service of a garbled message. The kind of discussion this volume promotes, though serious about the necessity of coherence throughout the larger system of the gospel, is also useful for clarifying, highlighting, preserving and promoting those central gospel themes jointly embraced while participants are at loggerheads on the intricate, but nonetheless important, support structure for those central themes. May this modest attempt increase our grasp of gospel glory. ☺

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## News

### PLNTD

This summer we are pleased to announce the launch of **PLNTD**—a church planting network focused on establishing and multiplying confessional church planting churches who are distinctively Baptist, missionally driven, and doctrinally Reformed. At the heart of **PLNTD** is the conviction that the Great Commission was given to the church, and the mature expression of a robust commitment to this commission inherently calls for a passion for church planting as faithful stewards of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

To learn more about this new network visit: [www.plntd.com](http://www.plntd.com)

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For more information and to register for courses visit:

<http://study.founders.org/>

# A Serious and Respectful Interaction with Kenneth Keathley

*Tom J. Nettles*

*Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach*

Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Company, 2010.

ISBN: 978-0805431988

232 pages including bibliography, name index,  
subject index, and Scripture index.

Kenneth Keathley's work on salvation in its relation to divine sovereignty provides a good opportunity to extend and refine the discussion on Calvinism currently active among Southern Baptists. His intention in this book is to lay claim to a view of salvation that is neither Calvinism nor Arminianism. The clearest historical proponent of Keathley's system is the sixteenth-century Jesuit theologian, Luis de Molina, in his espousal of an amalgamation of omniscience and sovereignty called *middle knowledge*. Molina's system was specifically designed to create a blend between Augustinianism and semi-Pelagianism. Some Catholic polemicists received it with pleasure because it seemed to meet the theological challenge presented by the soteriology of Luther and Calvin, particularly on the relation of the will to predestination, while crediting aspects of the reigning synergism. Molina's system created controversy among Jesuits, Augustinians, and Dominicans, led to long discussions within the official dogmatic councils of the Vatican, and finally provoked an order forbidding further discussion of Molina's confusing synthesis.

Keathley believes that Southern Baptists can do better, and he has tried to simplify the issues. He nevertheless recognizes that tackling this subject means that "precise definitions and nuanced arguments become *necessary*" [14, italics mine]. He must treat such tightly philosophical subjects as "necessity" and "causal determinism," rejecting those underpinnings for a basic philosophical construction that he believes makes more sense of all the phenomena of Scripture [14, 15], what Keathley ironically

describes as “the ingredients that seem to *necessitate* Molinism” [19, italics mine]. If Keathley is finally persuasive in the debate about “necessity,” that is, that necessity in human decisions contradicts human freedom, then one might legitimately wonder why he sought to be persuasive, why nuanced arguments are “necessary,” and why biblical ingredients “necessitate” any single conclusion about any subject at all.

### Keathley’s Case for Molinism

The ingredients that drive Keathley to set forth an alternate synthesis include “possible scenarios and counterfactuals” as elements of biblical narrative [19] as well as real freedom and real guilt for humans. His purpose is to substitute one philosophical worldview, Molinism or middle knowledge, for another, Calvinism or deterministic causality. In his words, “Molinism is a precise philosophical system that arose out of a commitment to certain principles clearly taught in the Bible” [19]. If one is to strive to give respectful interaction with a serious viewpoint carefully executed, he must seek the same kind of cogency in his argumentation and strive to elicit a consistent metaphysic out of the data presented in Scripture. Probably both of us would prefer straightforward exposition of Scripture set in a preaching format; we also know, however, that how we interpret and what we preach has much greater focus if built on a consciously considered biblical worldview. Texts are particular expressions of that worldview and, therefore, slightly angulated windows through which we peer into the whole biblical truth. I join him therefore in his “I’m sorry about that” [14] for the kind of definition, nuancing, and synthesizing that, in such an important area of theology seem, what else can we say, necessary.

Keathley’s work is easy to follow because its organization replicates meticulously his announced purpose. He gives brief summaries of the views he intends to reject and refute as well as those he intends to promote and defend. In substance, Calvinism and alternately hyper-Calvinism loom as his main targets of objection with some aspects of Arminianism challenged from time to time. He admirably projects his book as a working “towards the truth” rather than seeking to achieve a victory over those to whom he frequently refers as his “Calvinist brethren” [14]. He believes that the TULIP acronym is demonstrably false in the L and the I and that the others need such nuancing as to render them vacuous, or something other than they are. He proposes a Molinized version of Timothy George’s ROSES: Radical depravity, Overcoming grace, Sovereign election, Eternal life, Singular redemption. (See: Timothy George, *Amazing Grace: God’s Initiative, our Response* [Nashville: Lifeway Press, 2000], 71–87.) The in-

roduction is followed by two chapters that discuss the “Biblical Case for Molinism,” and the proposal that God desires the salvation of all, followed by five chapters that discuss respectively each point of the **ROSES** acronym.

In his introduction, in addition to the overall summary, Keathley describes Molinism as the formulation of a “radical ‘compatibilism’—a Calvinist view of divine sovereignty and an Arminian view of human freedom” [5]. This combination allows the Molinist to affirm “six pairs of twin truths.” They constitute his explanation of Molinism and its soteriological implications: God is both good and great, human freedom is both derived and genuinely ours, God’s grace is both monergistic and resistible, God’s election is both unconditional and according to foreknowledge, the saved are both preserved and will persevere, and Christ’s atonement is both unlimited in its provision and limited in its application [10–12]. The affirmation of simultaneously true polarities “makes Molinism very attractive” [12]. The great value in the Molinist approach, as Keathley sees it, is its demonstration “that it is not irrational to believe in the simultaneous existence of the sovereign God of the Bible and creatures endowed with genuine, responsible freedom” [13].

Some of these twin truths combine complementary ideas (e.g. God is both good and great, the saved are preserved and persevere, God is sovereign and creatures are responsible), but some, even by Molinist standards, must be seen as real contradictions. The assertions of language do not mend the mutual exclusions inherent in these concepts. Election cannot be both unconditional and “according to foreknowledge” given the Molinist idea of foreknowledge. Grace cannot be both monergistic and resistible, if the so-called monergistic aspect does not accomplish in some what it does accomplish in others—the something that makes the difference must be the human ingredient, thus eliminating the monergistic aspect of grace. That the atonement can be simultaneously unlimited in its provision, that is in every aspect of its nature, and at the same limited in its application assumes that no provision for its application was included in the reconciling work of the triune God in the human nature, the bodily suffering and spiritual and mental anguish, of Christ. To maintain both parts of the proposition, provision and application, or as Keathley states elsewhere [209] sufficient for all but efficient for those who believe, one must equivocate in his definition of atonement. More on this later.

The claim, therefore, of complementary and compatible truths is admirable but not unique to Molinism. Keathley believes that Calvinists appeal to mystery in this relationship “in order to avoid the *harsh and contradictory* conclusions of their own system” [14] (italics mine). Calvinists, unwilling

to corner the market on harshness and contradiction, go much further in unpacking the revelatory material on this subject and demonstrating, not just asserting, its non-contradictory relationship, than Keathley does. In fact, the irony of his caveat against Calvinism is that it comes immediately after he confessed mystery concerning how God foreknows precisely what “genuinely free creatures will choose” [13]. When Calvinists explain the world in terms of divine decrees of creation, providence, and election and God’s purposive use of and energetic involvement with secondary causation, including human activity, that is *harsh*; when Molinists reject divine decree, but substitute God’s decision to create in the full knowledge that human freedom would bring about exactly this kind of world, that is *not harsh*.

Keathley thinks he has avoided harshness by depositing “meticulous providence” in the bank of foreknowledge rather than the bank of decree. He discusses this in detail [20–38] by affirming that divine providence unfolds in light of contingency, counterfactuals, and conditionality. These traits characterize human actions thus guaranteeing them freedom, but do not render God’s foreknowledge of the events any less certain, or any less necessary [32]. Things happen just as God necessarily and certainly knows they will happen, but they happen apart from any meticulous decree. God, by middle knowledge, does not create a world that He decrees, but a world of which He has exhaustive foreknowledge. I will discuss this idea in more detail later, but for now, I merely mention several difficulties with this that, in the end, do not relieve Keathley of the problem he struggles with in decretal theology. If things are decreed, then man is not free, and therefore, not truly responsible, so Keathley reasons. I do not accept such reasoning as biblically warranted, and in constructing a system on such reason, difficulties appear.

First, the language involved in the verses Keathley quotes in an impressive section on divine providence [21–25], simply does not fit the model of foreknowledge as opposed to decree. God plans, He operates on the basis of the counsel of His own heart, He does all His will, His hand and plan predestined even the crucifixion of Christ. This language of plan, purpose, counsel, predestination pushes the envelope beyond omniscience.

Second, if Keathley takes this language seriously, and believes that foreknowledge accomplishes precisely what God would have decreed, how this relieves God’s ultimately causative relationship with the events is, indeed, a mystery. If we shared his objections to causation, would we not be justified in saying that his model is “harsh?”

Third, his moral objections to God’s decrees as causative make him seek a “balance” between divine sovereignty and human responsibility that

treats the weightiness of the creation as equal to that of the Creator. He pushes human decision into the eternal counsels in order to determine exactly what God is allowed to do, and as we shall discuss, without any “genuine” confidence on our part that the decree of the all-wise God actually is accomplished.

### Does God Desire the Salvation of All?

In posing the question as to whether God desires the salvation of all men, Keathley believes he comes close to sealing his case against Calvinism. He depicts his Calvinist brethren as “harsh,” insensitive, and virtually blasphemous or as sensibly and lovingly inconsistent. He discusses various answers to the questions “Does God save all persons? If not, why?” Under the helpful distinction of “one-will” theism and “two-wills” theism, Keathley outlines the arguments of Reformed and Arminian universalism [44–46], decretal salvation for the elect only (both the supra- and infralapsarian versions), and two “two-will” approaches. He rejects the one-will universalism while displaying the Universalists’ ire toward discriminatory election in some emotionally charged hostile language toward historical Calvinism [46, 47]. He also rejects the second single-will view of decretal soteriology, for it denies “universal love,” employs a hermeneutic that contextualizes the “world” and “all” passages, involves no “genuine universal offer of the gospel,” makes preaching less “persuasive” in nature, and eviscerates the gospel of its meaning for it declares to most of the world that God is not reconciled and, according to a decision made in eternity past, has “decided to remain at war with them.” [49–51].

He carefully discusses “two-wills theism” under the “hidden/revealed will” paradigm represented by John Piper and the “antecedent/consequent wills” paradigm, rejecting the first and defending the second. He mounts six objections to the first including the appearance of absolute contradiction between revealed and hidden wills, it makes Jesus hypocritical, the preacher hypocritical, God hypocritical, and avoids addressing the dilemma that it creates [54–57]. Keathley’s defense of the fourth option is short [58–62], but need not be longer for he already has interacted with the other three views that he rejects and has punctuated each discussion with statements of the superiority of the “antecedent/consequent will paradigm.” He believes that his view relieves the tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Antecedently God wills the salvation of all; but this salvation, willed for all, ultimately is the consequence of compliant human will [59, 126]. Even though Keathley recognizes the Calvinist objection to this [59] and seeks to disarm it, seeing God as initiator and completer, but

conditioned upon man's response in between, he cannot fail to see that this kind of election is not even close to unconditional.

I would like to propose that there is another way to conceive of God's singular will in its relation to a multiplicity of manifestations. The two wills paradigm is simply a way of framing the heightened importance of condemnation and salvation. Other less spectacular relations still play their part in demonstrating the glorious wisdom of God. A plant's spring glory and winter corruption are strikingly different but not contradictory. Even so the present corruption and eventual demise by fire of the present creation to be replaced by a new heaven and a new earth constitute different ways God demonstrates His manifold glory, but involve no contradiction. The unfallen state and the fallen state allow dazzling and sometimes bewildering displays of divine justice, outrage, vengeance, mercy, sacrifice, intervention, and other demonstrations of God's righteous and sovereign prerogative. Some revelations of the divine attitude may concern expectations and desire intrinsic to God's abiding perspective of the creation per creation without any contradiction to the divine intentions of grace and judgment concerning the creation as fallen creation.

Neither manifestation of the divine will is hidden; both are revealed as contributing to God's single will to manifest the full spectrum of His attributes. The first reveals the universal and unchangeable precepts of goodness and holiness as well as love toward all moral creatures, men and angels. This should be expected from a deity of infinite holiness and goodness and whose very nature is a constant outflowing of love. He manifests His character in all His work and cherishes the display and the dynamic interplay of His own infinitely glorious character. All creation reflects the glory of God and all rational creatures should worship God, adore Him, and give praise to Him as Creator and Sustainer of all things (Revelation 4:6–11). He has given commands to all His moral creatures some of which apply to all, some to angels alone [e.g. Hebrews 1:14; Revelation 9:14, 15), and some appropriate only to men. He saw all the creation before the fall of any, including angels, as very good, and as reflecting His glory in an unfallen condition. Both in rational and non-rational creation He found great pleasure. He loved His world and all its inhabitants.

The Fall does not remove this natural, or complacent, delight that God has in every aspect of that which He created, nor does it decrease the rightness of all things giving glory to Him for His goodness, nor His will that they do so. From the standpoint of the perversion of His image stamped on man, and His glory effaced in nature, God has no pleasure in the fallen condition as such, but that fallenness does not inhibit the manifestation of His glory in fit portions and ways through all of those things. From

this perspective, God says without any lack of earnestness, without fingers crossed, and with full sincerity toward sinners, “Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live” (Ezekiel 18:31f, ESV). He is commanding a state of repentance and consequent forgiveness combined with the holy operations of a new heart without respect to their inability to provide a satisfactory atonement or their slavery to corruption.

By right of creation and the authority of personal command God desires, and by place of supreme glory deserves, the righteous integrity of all people expressed in unabated praise to Him, even those that remain under condemnation (Philippians 2:9–11; Revelation 5:13, 14; 14:6, 7). He has the authority and demonstrates utter sincerity in sending the gospel to Jew and Gentile commanding all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:29–31) and to believe in Christ (Acts 3:22–26; Acts 28:23, 24; Romans 16:25–27) and in establishing such trust as the only means by which sinners may be set right (Acts 4:10–12). All the commands of the gospel serve the end of restoring a sinful people to uprightness before the Law and holiness of heart. He has the right to publish abroad the only means by which the fallen may be restored (Romans 10:9–13), the right to command compliance with its conditions of repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 24:46, 47), to maintain the requirement and desire that all His creatures embrace and reflect the originally-possible perfected holiness and completed righteousness endemic to their original state (Ephesians 4:23, 24; 1 Thessalonians 3:13), but He has no duty, even a duty arising from His nature as love, to give grace. The promised righteous curse has come and its removal is not a matter of divine obligation, but of pure grace, righteously composed and discreetly appointed (1 Thessalonians 1:4–10; 5:9–11).

The second revelation of the divine will is that of the fuller demonstration of His goodness through the display of both wrath and mercy (Romans 2:1–6; Revelation 6; 15:1, 7; 19:1–6; Romans 3:21–26; Titus 3:3–7). This will consists of a coherent set of arrangements of grace that the triune God has undertaken to bring to complete salvation a definite portion, and not others, of the fallen human race (Revelation 13:8), denominated as elect in Christ before the foundation of the world, so that all the elements of God’s precepts come to full flower in them. Because this salvific will is all of grace, is owed to no person whatever, no matter what age or what social condition, God has the full right of particularization in its granting. He has revealed this specific particularization (e.g. Romans 8:29, 30; 9:11–

16). This revelation unfolds God's plan, established before the creation of the world, for redemption through a blood sacrifice for sin (Revelation 5; 7:9–12; Hebrews 1:3; 2:10–18; 9:11–28). This redemption displays God's mercy in the call and constitution of the church composed of Jew and Gentile and people of all ethnicities and tribes in every age until the Lord returns (Ephesians 2:11–22; Revelation 7:9–12).

For the constituting of this church as an enduring testimony to the excellence of God's mercy (1 Peter 2:9, 10) the entire creation was called forth by the will of God (Colossians 1:10–29). The church appears in Revelation 12 as a woman clothed in the sun with the moon under her feet and with a crown of twelve stars. Creation exists to display her beauty, and, because of her existence in the eternal plan of God, the incarnation was decreed and carried out by God (Revelation 12:1–6). This involved the fall of angels, their instrumentality in the fall of man, and the curse on man and the world as a result of the fall, and Satan's particular opposition to the church (Revelation 12:7–17).

This plan is not hidden, but revealed. (Ephesians 1:3–10). It is not secret but is described in detail. That God has an elect people is revealed specifically (2 Thessalonians 2:13f et al.). That reality is not hidden and the traits as to how the elect may be distinguished in this life from the non-elect are set forth in clear terms. They hear the gospel, they are convicted of its truth, they believe in Christ, who alone can redeem, and they seek God's love and holiness as the most dominant attraction of their lives (1 Corinthians 1:20–24; Galatians 1:3–5; Colossians 1:5b–7; 1 Thessalonians 1:4–10; 2 Timothy 1:8–10; Titus 1:1–3; 1 Peter 1:1,2; 1 John 3:9, 10). That God has a peculiarly elect people, definite in number and certain of calling and duration in faith until the day of Christ admits of no ambiguity. Any ambiguity in our being able to determine this in particular cases is due simply to the remnants of indwelling sin and noetic haze on both the subjects and objects of spiritual examination (2 Corinthians 13:5–7).

We are confronted, however, with two areas of this revelation in which hiddenness operates. One is that secret operation by which God opens the minds of some, and not others, to respond in faith to Christ. After several chapters in which Matthew has narrated a torrent of responses, both negative and positive, to Jesus' teaching and demonstrations of power and forgiving prerogative, Jesus spoke praise to his Father, "I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes Father, for such was your gracious will" (Matthew 11:25, 26, ESV). God's gracious will distinguished one from the other. Jesus goes on to say that the Father's gracious prerogative of revelation, that is, internal moral enlightenment

that brings a sinner to true faith, is just as truly His own prerogative—“All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (11:27, ESV). The same dynamic operates in 1 Corinthians 1:18–31. Left to themselves, both Jews and Greeks consider the message of the cross folly, but those that are “called” see this message as the power of God and the wisdom of God. This is clearly not because any personal traits made one to be distinguished from another; only their calling according to election distinguished them. Thus, even in the matter of turning from resistance to compliance, no one may boast of any resident faculty, but only in the sovereign choice and effectual power of God. Hiding and revealing is a matter of divine prerogative, and that He does so is clearly revealed.

A second aspect of hiddenness concerns the reasons behind many of the particular events within God’s moral and redemptive purposes. The reasons for the incarnation, the reasons for the propitiatory death of Christ, the reasons for the resurrection—the moral necessity that gave rise to these is revealed and may be understood with some degree of clarity and certainty, though the infinite riches of mercy involved in them may never be exhausted. But the particular divine logic and intrinsic moral propensity that governs the massive number of particular events and the place of persons within those events is hidden from us. Job learned this lesson when he found himself unable to explain even the most elementary matters of natural observation. After God overwhelmed him with questions of this nature, God challenged Job, “Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it.” Job then must confess, “Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further.” (Job 40:2–5, ESV). God is not through. He confronts Job with sovereignty of divine moral power and Job’s impotence (6–14) followed by an intensified demonstration of Job’s inability to deal with irrational creatures of great natural strength (40:15–41:34). Job responded, “I know you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted,” and realized that any questioning of the purposes of God called for repentance—“I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you: therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (42:2, 5–6, ESV).

This reality makes the tirades of non-Calvinists to which Keathley gives space all the more bewildering. They do not embody sound thinking on the part of the theologians involved but are examples of how quickly we can be brought to believe that we are good, our values are untarnished, and that a God that does not fit our present state of affections is not worthy

of our love. To conclude that the distinguishing electing purpose of God indicates that we have a greater love for our children than God does shows a disturbingly narrow focus (46f). Robert Shank, an Arminian, characterizes the idea that God might give universal commands for repentance and yet reserve a special call of grace for a limited number as the “most abhorrent, the most reprehensible, the most malicious and despicable deceptions that ever can be conceived, and God Himself constitutes the most abominable curse that ever can be visited on His own creation” [118]. This kind of emotional outbreak is the height of spiritual arrogance. Keathly quotes Thomas Talbot as speaking sarcastically of an electing God that “will someday transform my heart so that I can be just as calloused towards my loved ones as he is” [46]. Keathly uses Talbot to indicate that “traditional Calvinism [is] sub-Christian” and, in evaluating Talbot’s exchange with John Piper, that “Reformed theology teaches God might not love our children as much as we do” [47].

We can be sure that God, as the Creator and Sustainer of all things, loves our children, and all people, with a natural love far greater than the most self-sacrificing love we can muster. He also has an unalloyed clarity of vision concerning their sinfulness, their rebellion against Him, their natural lack of love for Him and their intrinsic destructiveness toward all knowledge of Him (Psalm 58:3–5; Jude 15, 16). He knows that they are constantly on the precipice of judgment and He has no obligation to give special redemptive love to any of them or any of the ungodly in the rest of the world. He surveys the entire world, fashions and knows the hearts of all His creatures, works His well-considered, wisely disposed, perfectly executed will, that is, His counsel, in all the world, and delivers those whose hope is in Him (Psalm 33), which hope has arisen from His own sovereign purpose. He is good to all and has mercy on all He has made, preserves all that love Him, who do so because He first loved them, and destroys the wicked (Psalm 145:9, 20). His mercies and goodness to all far exceed the most ardent affections we have for those most near to our purest love; His hatred of evil and those who do it is purer and more righteous in its origin and execution than our most noble resistance to evil (Psalm 5). That He still has compassion and shows mercy to any degree to this fallen world makes our selfish, narrow concerns and our manifestations of natural affection and even our most self-sacrificial love bland by comparison; that He elects myriads from this corrupt mass to forgiveness, at the sacrifice of His eternally beloved Son, and fits them for enjoyment of His imperishable glory in heaven does not invite the snarls, or accusations of injustice, from sinful creatures.

It is most unbecoming, and spiritually dangerous, to declare our hostility to a God who exercises His just liberty in the dispensing of His electing, redeeming, and regenerating love. It would be much more becoming for any sinful creature to manifest the devoted perception of Ann Hasseltine [Judson] when she wrote in her diary as a seventeen year old, “I felt that if Christ had not died to make an atonement for sin, I could not ask God to dishonor his holy government so far as to save so polluted a creature, and that should he even now condemn me to suffer eternal punishment, it would be so just that my mouth would be stopped, and all holy things in the universe would acquiesce in the sentence, and praise him as a just and righteous God. My chief happiness now consisted in contemplating the moral perfections of the glorious God.” (*Memoir*, 18).

Keathley assumes that “the greatest way for humans to bring glory to God is to choose Him freely,” [61] a position that he sees as a perfect fit with the antecedent/consequent wills paradigm, though it contradicts his earlier consent that human depravity means that we are incapable of even “wanting to be saved”[3]. Aside from his erroneous perception that Calvinists do not believe that humans freely choose God as their portion, God is not most glorified in their choice of Him but in His choice of them. “In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace” (Ephesians 1:5, 6, ESV). Our choice is not glorious in the ultimate sense, but His grace is. It is a glorious grace and is given in accordance with the purpose of His will that issued forth in His predestination of sinners to be His sons. His choice, not ours, is glorious and worthy of praise. “In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory” (Ephesians 1:11, 12, ESV). We exist for the praise of His glory. That we hope in Christ proceeds from the purpose of God, a part of which is the predestination of some to this very hope. God is glorified in us in that His relentless grace is the only source and substance of our hope in Christ. “In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory” (Ephesians 1:13, 14, ESV). The ESV, in the phrase “until we acquire possession of it,” has interpreted the *peripoiēseos* as synonymous with “our inheritance.” A better rendition would be the “purchased and preserved possession of God.” Thus, the Spirit guarantees as a pledge, He Himself being a portion of it, our inheritance until the time

that God's purchased possession is fully and without diminution in His presence. That day, when all that Christ has bought with His own blood, including all sinners that are "bought with a price," are in God's presence, no praise for human merit or human choice will be heard but only praise to God for such unmerited, infrustrable, invincible grace. The glory will reside, not in our free choice of Him, but in His free choice of us, His purchase of us, and His sustaining gifts to us, and how His wisdom and mercy are shown in such a choice and such gifts. Molinism completely empties God of this kind of glory, because His gifts are not wholly the result of His choices, but are suspended on His precognition of our choices. That view has no conformity to Paul's recitation in Ephesians 1.

That God loves some with a redemptive love not given to others is not secret in the Bible. "In love he predestined us for adoption ... But God being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ ... You have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him ... I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me ... God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us ... God commends his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us ... [Nothing] will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord ... Herein is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins" (Ephesians 1:3; 2:4, 5; John 17:2, 23; Romans 5:5, 8; 8:39 1 John 4:10, ESV). These manifestations of saving love operate efficiently and particularly for those that the Father gave the Son before the foundation of the world. This group consists not of the original disciples only, nor of the Israelites only, but of people from the whole world and throughout all generations. All of those given to the Son in eternity will see, that is, perceive the glory and value of, the kingdom of God through the new birth (John 3:3; 6:37, 45; 17:2, 3), and thus manifest their call and election in believing the gospel. Their belief of the gospel and growth in Christ-likeness will point to God's distinguishing love as the fountain and efficient cause of each successive blessing of saving grace (1 Peter 1:3–9).

Keathley believes that passages like John 3:16, 1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9 self-evidently "declare that God desires the salvation of all men" [43]. He refers to the contextual interpretations of Turretin and James White [49] virtually without comment but with the clear implication that those kinds of interpretations only serve as evidence that decretal theology

cannot pass biblical muster. His view of these texts and their implications does not satisfy the particular contexts of each.

Each of these texts has, not only credible, but compelling contextual interpretations that show them as promotive of decretal theology. John 3:16 shows us that God does not leave the world in the default position of condemnation, but loves it with such a quality that He brings redemption to it through His Son, the only Being in whom salvation could come. This was not a condemning mission but a rescue mission to be evidenced in faith, that is, trust in the completed work of Christ. This trust does not come to the natural man who loves darkness and shows his condemnation is just because of such a perverse love. The one who trusts, however, is no better in himself but his coming to Christ is in itself a demonstration that God has wrought such faith (John 3:21). This is consistent with the conflict between unbelief and belief throughout John as the reader sees that John's argument is that only God Himself can give such faith (John 3:3; 5:21; 6:60–65; 12: 37–40) and those to whom He gives it were given to the Son before the creation of the world (John 17:2).

The meaning of 2 Peter 3:9 must also be seen as one element of an extended argument. In short, God is waiting to inaugurate the New Heavens and New Earth He promised until all of His elect are visibly confirmed by being established in repentance. The ungodly, those who are not elect and thus whose knowledge of God and even of the gospel is ineffectual and unproductive, therefore, of holiness and fruits of righteousness, are being kept “under punishment until the day of judgment” (2:14). Their lives of resistance to God and the gospel, their lack of gratitude for the purifying impact of gospel truth, their perversion of truth, their unholy, immoral lifestyles, their scoffing at the reality of final judgment even while their settled judgment has been made ready are described in sober detail in many passages throughout 2 Peter (e.g. 1:9, 2:13, 14, 20–22; 3:7, 16). On the other hand, the godly (who are elect, 1:10) increase in energetic pursuit of holiness, delight in the power and glory of Christ Himself, look eagerly for the establishment of righteousness in the world, respond to biblical admonitions in doctrine and purity while they wait for the presence of Christ that will bring an end to the present system of corruption (1:4) by the purifying impact of His appearing (1:3, 11, 19; 2:9; 3:2, 10, 13, 14, 17, 18). God has a people He is saving out of this present evil age; He provides all that is needed for perseverance in faith and repentance through His call, the presence of which is the demonstration of our election (1:3, 10, 11). He wills, with an infrustrable will, that all those in every age on whom He has set his heart to come to Christ and continue to show their

separateness from the world through ongoing repentance and diligence in the pursuit of truth and godliness (1:10, 19; 3:14, 17). We count, therefore, the patience of God as salvation (3:15). Peter is not saying that God delays the triumphant return of His Son in glory because of a hope that even the non-elect might come. If this were the patience of which Peter wrote, every generation demonstrates the futility of its outlook. The entire context of the book presses against such an interpretation. The vivid descriptions of the ungodly and the judgment already on them with eternal fire waiting combined with Peter's calm assurance that God rescues His people, the godly, from the coming divine retribution elicit a contextually credible interpretation. Peter is affirming that God will lose none of His elect and while His judgment delays He is saving and confirming in holiness more and more people (3:9, 15).

The "all men" in 1 Timothy 2:4 is the same "all men" that Jesus said His cross would draw to Him in John 12:32. The Greeks sought Jesus and he pointed to the cross as the means through which they would find Him. The Jewish Messiah was truly "Son of Man" dying not for the nation only (John 11:51, 52) but for the "children of God scattered abroad." Paul as an apostle of the Messiah, justifies his ministry to the Gentiles by pointing to Christ's ransom (1 Timothy 2:6) as inclusive of all nations and not Jews only (2:7).

All the saving benefits of the redeeming love of Christ are for the elect alone. They have not made themselves elect, and thus have nothing in themselves that distinguishes them from another. They confess that they are no better, that there is no distinction to be found in themselves, and that they are like the rest of mankind (Romans 3:9, 22; Ephesians 2:3; Titus 3:3). The clear fact is, they have received a love that is qualitatively distinct from others. They are loved with a love with which God does not love others. He loves the non-elect with elements of both benevolent and complacent love in a far richer and more profound way than we have any capacity to conceive. We, however, merely show the corruption and man-centeredness of what we perceive as our highest virtue, when we dare insinuate that our love transcends that of God if He withholds electing love from our loved ones. God indeed does discriminate and does not give His saving favor, His redeeming love, to all men and does not purpose, or will, the salvation of each and every individual.

A system of soteriology that is built on the assumption that God's love is level, the same for every person, is neither metaphysically, theologically, experientially, nor exegetically defensible. The view feeds off an indiscriminately narrow texting of words, rather than contextualizing biblical concepts; it plays to self-centered emotional prejudices by assuming

that our familial and amicable concerns easily translate into the certainty of universal salvific love and redemptive measures from God; the world view, consequently, becomes one of seeking to achieve a “balance” between divine will and action and human will and action. When this framework of perception is in place, one can trace out its effects in every aspect of the ROSES acronym expounded by Keathley.

### Radical Depravity

In his defense of his view of radical depravity, Keathley places his view of depravity in opposition to “determinism.” As part of a persistent effort to depict Molinism’s view of freedom as more “genuine” than that of Calvinists, Keathley claims that Calvinists have “to radically redefine freedom” (sic), in order to make the claim that causal determinism is compatible with human free will [14]. I am not sure he can demonstrate that Calvinists have *redefined* freedom or are “redefining free will” [9]. Calvinists have carefully worked at *defining* freedom, a task that Keathley takes on himself, but that they redefine it assumes there is some default understanding of freedom, some absolute definition that Calvinists have altered. What absolute definition does Keathley have in mind that Calvinists have altered? Keathley refers to his view as a “genuine definition of human choice, freedom, and responsibility” [6]. To achieve this genuineness in definition, Keathley himself has to define his terms carefully, including what he calls “man’s genuine ownership of his choices,” a “middle knowledge approach to God’s sovereignty” as well as a “soft libertarian understanding of human choices” throughout the book. None can fault him for working hard to make his definitions clear. Nor can a Calvinist that seeks to produce a clear understanding of what he means by the words he uses be accused of some sort of verbal transgression by doing so. Definition is the task in either case. If he or the Calvinist achieves the “genuine definition” of any of these disputed terms is a question to be weighed carefully. Keathley’s interest in “genuineness” permeates the work in the form of God’s “genuine desire,” [2, 4, 7] the gospel being “genuinely offered,” [4] Christ “genuinely died for all people,” “humans genuinely choose” [7] salvation being “genuinely available,” humans are “genuinely free,” and so throughout. Apparently, genuineness is self-defining, and constitutes a distinction between Calvinism and Molinism. Genuineness, however, is not a self-evident abstraction, but may be predicated of a subject only in its relation to the source of authority, the Bible, and its consequent intrinsic consistency.

So, what is genuine freedom according to Molinism. In Molinism, according to Keathley, “we are causal agents—we are the origin of our

respective decisions for which we are morally responsible” [8]. Nothing distinctive there; Calvinists believe the same, that every person is a morally responsible free agent, culpable for every wrong doing. He speaks of freedom under two headings, the freedom of responsibility and the freedom of integrity. The one, responsibility, is the right to be the originator of one’s own decisions and the second, integrity, is the ability to act in a way consistent with what one believes to be right [76, 77]. The latter will be complete in the state of eternity for Christians and is that which God always experiences. No Calvinist would disagree substantially with those ideas.

Much, in fact, that Keathley asserts in the extensive treatment of how human creatures make decisions is common to both himself and Calvinists. Calvinists would not have any objection to his exposition of “will-setting moments” [72 et al.], if he would see that even those decisions made in will-setting moments are not made in a moral, emotional, and intellectual vacuum. Contrary to his affirmation of Robert Saucy that human free will constitutes “a little citadel of creativity *ex nihilo*” [75], no human action, even those of new born infants arise *ex nihilo*. (“The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth speaking lies.” Psalm 58:3). And even if our actions and decisions did at some moment take on an *ex nihilo* character, to define such biblically, that is in harmony with the divine exertion of creative energy, means that we have a detailed purpose driving us to do what we do. *Creatio ex nihilo* does not mean that God acted without purpose or a driving internal motivation, but that the universe came into existence merely from the divine will and power, nothing pre-existing but God Himself.

Keathley argues that God has meticulous control over “big things” as well as over “things that involve other agents” [22, 24], a discussion with which I certainly agree, along with my Calvinist friends; but he also argues that one must conceive of God’s freedom in “libertarian terms.” Accordingly he says, that “nothing internal or external compelled Him to create this or any other world. God had the freedom to choose not to create” [26]. Certainly nothing external to God provoked His act of creation, but how Keathley knows that nothing internal to God caused Him to create, I cannot fathom. In fact, the biblical record indicates that dispositions internal to God’s interaction as Father, Son and Holy Spirit motivated, or caused, Him to do as He did, while His will was not conditioned by anything external to Himself. Nebuchadnezzar, restored to reason, praised and honored the God of heaven by affirming, “All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and no one can stay his hand or say to him, ‘What have you done?’” (Daniel 4:35). Certainly

Keathley does not believe that God's *ex nihilo* creation was done apart from any defining purpose intrinsic to His nature. Even God's supposed "libertarian freedom" in creation and redemption comes from an infinitely perfect purpose consistent with God's own eternal propensity to glorify Himself and give a host of creatures the eternal occupation of adoring His inexhaustible and ineffable majesty. This seemed to be the motivational focus of Jesus when He prayed, "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world" [John 17:24].

The single idea against which Keathley develops his soft libertarianism is causal determinism. He opposes it most systematically in his argument against the Calvinist view of total depravity and in preference for his defense of "radical depravity." The impact of the idea is even more pervasive than that single issue. In fact, this is the idea that is the sickness unto death of every species of Calvinism, according to Keathley, and infects each part of the system all the way from the particularity of God's love for the elect to the particularity of the death of the Son for those given to Him by the Father. He views causal determinism as simplistic, mechanistic, materialistic, and reductionistic [93–99]. He represents causal determinism as partaking of fallacies endemic to each of these categories: choice is more complex than the greatest desire, human choice cannot be reduced to cause and effect relationships such as may be observed either in a machine or in the materialistic and/or chemical patterns of the brain's operations. He warns Calvinists that "their historical allies have been Darwinists" or atheists [95]. In fact, the "most ardent advocates of compatibilism have been skeptics" [95].

In spite of Keathley's condemnation by association, Calvinists will not dissociate themselves from the principle of causation, though employed by such erroneous advocates. The errors of atheists and materialists do not arise from the principle of causation, but from their application of the principle in a massively short-sighted way. They aggressively repress necessary data, such as the existence, moral character, and purpose of God. The problem is not causation but their fear of God's actual involvement in the world as the predominant causative agent, much as Keathley himself fears. They prefer a world evolved from non-personal irrational force in opposition to the abundance of evidence, built on the assumption of cause and effect, for an intelligent omnipotent creator and designer. They fear a God so deeply involved because such a deity might also have moral purposes, and therefore, call humanity to account. No God, no fear. Keathley avoids affirmation of God's control of all things either directly, or by secondary

causation, for God might not be able to withstand the moral scrutiny such control involves and human choices would be merely illusory [95, 96].

Keathley's relentless, but simplistic, reduction of the Calvinist viewpoint to mechanistic materialism makes him seek a view that is somehow free from causation. When causality becomes "the all explaining principle," Keathley observes, "it explains too much and, as a result, not enough" [99]. Keathley has adopted the position that moral factors, such as "sin and unbelief," somehow are outside the parameters of a metaphysical explanation of causality. He seeks negative reactions to causality by injecting ominous overtones in the word "determinism." We should not be moved by that. I personally am happy that such a reality as determinism exists. The world is made that way, I gain security every day from an implicit confidence in determinism, and my security before God is nurtured by deterministic assurance of divine revelation. The second-story of my house holds me up because the strength of the materials and the integrative aspect of their construction is superior to the downward tendency of my weight. That is causal determinism. I travel without fear that my wife will have abandoned me when I return, because I know that her self-respect, her love for me, her personal moral convictions, her commitment to the seriousness of vows made before God, and her personal zeal for marriage as a picture of the relation between Christ and the church all conspire to determine that she will remain faithful in my absence. So is her confidence in me. That is determinism, confidence in an outcome built on prevailing moral principles.

The failure of moral uprightness in some instances does not invalidate this model of interpersonal fidelity or the principle of moral determination. Failures point out that other features, often hidden, may arise and overwhelm us so that we choose the flesh as opposed to the Spirit. When that happens, it demonstrates that we have failed to maintain sufficient awareness of the large number of factors that conspire to destroy us (Galatians 6:1; 1 Corinthians 10:12; Luke 22:31–34; 1 Peter 5:6–9). Other times it indicates that one does not have the Spirit of God (1 John 2:19, 20), and thus is not mortifying and crucifying the flesh (Romans 8:12; Galatians 5:24) and does not belong to Christ. Though the trail of connection is complex, we still recognize that our actions are, in one way of considering them, evidences of influential and diversely prevailing forces in the heart. If that were not so, then none of these Scriptures could serve to give evidence of one's spiritual state.

Moral causative determinism is explained in Hebrews 11:24–26 concerning Moses: "By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He consid-

ered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.” This is choice built on a clear moral vision produced by the infinitely superior attraction of eternal pleasure in the presence of God and His redeeming Son. So it was with Paul who wrote, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18). Given all the factors involved, both for Moses and for Paul, of an objective knowledge of life in the presence of God combined with a new-born heart that sees and cherishes the kingdom of God and its surpassing glory, their determination could not be other than suffering here for glory hereafter. This is determinism. I know that nothing will ever separate me from the love of God because it is mine in Christ Jesus our Lord. Paul explains that an invincible series of divine actions that fully satisfy every aspect of his moral nature conspire to make it impossible for the most powerful forces of creation, both moral and natural, to separate God’s elect from His purpose of glory for them. His actions, affections and purposes far outweigh all contrary forces. This is determinism.

Determinism means that events proceed, both natural and moral events, as connected expressions of the various previous factors relevant to that event. A number of causes, who can tell how many, conspire to determine that a thing is rather than not, or is as it is rather than some other way. All logic, all experimentation, all conversation, all preaching, all efforts to convince, all efforts to motivate depend on our implicit, or explicit, submission to the reality of causal determinism. This truth generated Keathley’s efforts to show that consent to Molinism is a “necessary” conclusion of an honest consideration of all factors. An effort to remove this as a factor in spiritual life or theological formulation defies rationality. Keathley seeks to escape determinism by opting for a “set of choices” available to each person, regenerate or unregenerate, within certain parameters [87, 99]. The moral “boundaries” are set, therefore, according to the present spiritual condition, but within those boundaries “agent causation” rules out the horrible specter of determinism.

As mentioned above, Keathley presents his alternative to determinism under the nomenclature of “self determination” [61] and “agent causation.” [95, 99]. Only upon this concept of agent causation, so Keathley asserts, can one maintain that “humans are ultimately responsible for their moral decisions” [99]. In this way humans reflect the divine image. But “agent causation [95] does not, to use Keathley’s critique of causal determinism, “provide any new information or logically move the ball forward” [94]. Within this sphere of moral possibilities for agent causation, a person might still ask legitimately why one action seems more reasonable or

pleasurable to the agent than another. And if there is a “Why,” even if not entirely clear to the agent himself, then determinism has crept back in unawares. If by self-determination and agent causation, he really means that human choices have nothing that determines them or are uncaused, he introduces a more difficult set of problems and has left the words “determined” and “causation” without definition. This nebulous concept of self-determination ends up in the fallacy of an infinite regress of causes. If agent causation really means “no causation” then we are faced with the absurdity of the existence of a temporal, and thus dependent, thing without a cause. If such is the explanation for the existence of human choices, then literally billions of things come into existence every moment without a cause, a most thoroughly atheistic conclusion. Keathley will not consent to that of course, but since he already has rejected the idea that human choices may be identified with their greatest desire [94], or as Edwards so much more thoroughly expresses it “the last dictate of the understanding,” Keathley must come up with some other actuality of will intrinsic to the finite agent that is not the reification of desire, or the last dictate of the understanding. From whence shall his help come? Such disconnected “freedom” of human choice, however, does not express the divine image at all, and, if so disconnected from cause, has no moral texture and indicates nothing about the character of the actor (cf. Matthew 15:18, 19; James 1:15; 4:1). On the contrary, God’s choices are expressions of His purpose intrinsic to His nature; His freedom operates as a perfectly consistent expression of His immutable perfections.

Beyond the specific sphere of God’s own choices and immediate activities (e.g. the killing of Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5:1–10), God employs all His creatures directly for His purposes. Natural forces are constantly upheld by Him and employed as the source of blessing for all (Colossians 1:15–17; Acts 17:24, 25; Psalm 104:10–24) while they remain directly at His disposal to be used immediately by Him to judge, to chasten, to sanctify, and to destroy (Joel 1; Amos 9:5, 6; Nahum 1; Psalm 114; Habakkuk 3; Mark 4:35–41). Moral creatures, men and angels, also do His bidding either by command or by providence, sometimes revealed and sometimes unrevealed, while holding them accountable for their actions. How striking is the biblical phenomenon of God’s claim to responsibility when these actions are sinful in the creatures through whom He has performed them (Isaiah 10:5–19; Nahum 2, 3; Habakkuk 1:5–11; 2:8–20; 2 Thessalonians 2:7–12; Acts 4:27–29). Many of the descriptions of what God has His human instruments do are truly breathtaking and shocking, yet God is not ashamed to reveal that He is the one behind these actions and even uses language of immediacy in them: “Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger;

... Against a godless nation I send him, and against the people of my wrath I command him ... to tread them down like the mire of the streets” (Isaiah 10:5, 6). But Assyria had no intention of performing a just deed for God nor to recognize that he was God’s instrument: “But he does not so intend, and his heart does not so think; but it is in his heart to destroy, and to cut off nations not a few” (10:7). And when the king of Assyria boasts of his exploits, God promises him his comeuppance: “Shall the axe boast over him who hews it, or the saw magnify itself against him who wields it? ... Therefore the Lord God of hosts will send wasting sickness among his stout warriors, etc.” (10:15, 16). Nahum continues the words of God against Assyria: “Behold I am against you declares the Lord of Hosts, and I will burn your chariots in smoke, and the sword shall devour your young lions. I will cut off your prey from the earth, and the voice of your messengers shall no longer be heard” (2:13). God uses moral agents as He sees fit, even through their sinful activities, while He holds them accountable and justly punishable for their performance of His will. This is a causal determinism perfectly harmonious, in the biblical revelation, with free moral activity of moral agents. So with Judas (Matthew 26:20–25; cf. with Psalm 109) and Herod and Pontius Pilate in the crucifixion of Jesus (Acts 4:27–29).

Revelation 17:16, 17 presents the reader with a repulsive and startling picture of the cannibalistic destructiveness and nauseous and murderous jealousies of competing evil powers at work in the world. Verse 17 reads, “They [ten kings and the Beast] will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled.”

These actions of hostile and hateful aggression, though committed by powers given over to evil against another power that is the source of much of the earth’s rebellion against God, carry out their acts of personal envy and hatred because “God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose.” They continue their insidious operations until “the words of God are fulfilled.” One would rightly say that their actions serve a punitive purpose in God’s determination of them, but that does not diminish the reality that they are individually moral and therefore punishable. Their culpability suffers no amelioration by God’s having purposed, even put it into their hearts, to act with such selfish vindictiveness.

This interaction, clearly operative in these texts, between God’s moral purposes, determined according to a transcendently excellent decree, and the responsible freedom of other moral agents is not valid only with fallen creatures but with unfallen creatures. As a glorious and unfallen angel,

Satan, in a vital event in the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose, fell by his own will and pride, and as a fallen being sought the destruction of God's good creation and will continue to operate under divine sovereignty until he has accomplished all that God determined that he should do. These actions include his incredibly audacious aggressiveness in the temptations of Christ and the instigation of Judas to betray Him, his war on the chosen of God, and his final relegation to a place prepared for him (Revelation 12:7–12; Matthew 4:1–11; Luke 22:3; Revelation 17:14; Matthew 25:31, 32, 41). Eve, without a predisposition to sin, fell through being deceived by the subtlety and superior cleverness of Satan (1 Timothy 2:14), received the just penalty for her sin. Adam, without a predisposition to sin, perhaps moved by the power of affection and sympathy for Eve, followed her into sin (Genesis 3:6), receiving in himself and for all his posterity a just penalty of death, involving both condemnation and corruption (Genesis 3:17–19; Romans 5:14, 16, 19, 21; 1 Corinthians 15:21, 22, 45–49).

Their actions, though disobedient to a specific positive command, at the same time accomplished God's determined purpose which He brought about by particular arrangements of providence. This must be conceded unless we can conceive of God's having created the world without a view or purpose to glorify Himself most fully through the obedience of His beloved Son in redeeming a sinful people at enmity with Him and that the Fall, the most universally implicative event in history, "happened" with no providential arrangement for its happening. As demonstrated in the examples above, God may so invest His purposes into the wills and hearts of free moral creatures that they act with full personal responsibility, are held accountable for their actions as well as for what they perceived as their motivating force, while God, whose purpose transcends the purpose of creatures, is neither a sinner, nor the perpetrator of that which is sinful in the creatures' actions (Habakkuk 1:6, 12, 13).

The scriptural account of history permeated with divine power and prophecy and human debility and perverseness presses the reader ineluctably to conclude that God may decree an action, operate in the minutia of historical events for some time according to a hidden purpose (Genesis 50:20, 21; 1 Samuel 16:14–23), bring about its accomplishment through immediate providence or through morally responsible instruments that He wields as a woodsman does the axe, and do all this in pursuit of a manifestation of His wisdom and glory. Otherwise Paul could never write, "For to me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom

of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him” (Ephesians 3:8–12).

The resistance to determinism, a dissociation of effects from causes, simply won't work. Verbal circumlocutions or isolation of spheres where causes are ineffectual do not alter the character of events, including human choices, which characterize the world that God has made. All learning, all logic, all communications, all discipline, all research depend upon the assumption of real and equal connections between subject and predicate. Keathley's efforts, therefore, to imprison the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity into a deterministic box while highlighting his view of “soft libertarianism” and “agent causation” does not serve the cause of biblical freedom. If his “radical depravity” were truly radical then it would mean that depravity poisons the root of every human faculty and would yield only resistance to every holy action of God. The concept of a sinner not resisting while left to his corrupt innate sinfulness is a contradiction.

Molinism views divine sovereignty as operative through foreknowledge rather than decree. Between God's natural knowledge of all possible worlds and the world that actually exists by God's creative act, there is a group of “feasible” worlds, that is, worlds in which God's will would be accomplished. Out of those feasible worlds, those that constitute God's “middle knowledge,” He selects one to actualize. That actualized order is one in which genuinely free creatures do what God wills—creatures are thus free in this foreseen world and God's will is accomplished because He is sovereign in creating this single option out of an infinite number of possible worlds. I see some difficulties with this view.

First, in the infinite number of possible worlds under the purview of God's natural knowledge, one would suppose that He saw one world, because only one would be needed, in which His will would be accomplished through causal determinism. But, since such a concatenation of events, according to Molinism, eliminates genuine human freedom, God must find out of this infinite number of worlds one in which those same things would be accomplished apart from causal determinism. The causally determined world provides the unalterable pattern for the non-causally determined world. If that is the case it is difficult to see how any metaphysical explanation can make humans more free in the second than in the first. And, in spite of Keathley's hard-hitting critique of R. C. Sproul, Jr. [81–85] in making God the author of sin (a position Keathley says is the logical outcome of the Calvinist system), his own system of Molinism does little to change the dynamic of falling dominoes [85]. How do we know

that God did not see a world in which Adam and Eve never fell? Why did He not create that world? If He did see it and did not create it, then by creation in the face of foreknowledge is He not responsible for sin? He must have wanted a fallen world, but, according to Molinism, must abstain from decree and yet arrange for its lapse through creatures made in His image without Himself being evil and incurring personal guilt. To avoid this conclusion of a guilty God, the Molinist has a God that, instead of creating the world of His decree, chose to create one of the ones in which the creature's fall would occur in the absence of a divine decree that He do so. Keathley believes this view succeeds in both divine sovereignty and divine abstinence. I think it does neither.

Another important issue in which Molinism provides little help, given the necessity of libertarian human freedom, concerns how God can work all things together for good to those that love God? Beyond that, how can we ever affirm that God saw a world operating on the basis of "genuine human freedom" in which His will actually would be accomplished? Would it ever be possible to communicate to us, in a finally trustworthy manner, through human instrumentality? Perhaps all those that claim to speak for God, or write inspired material, are false prophets, or simply deluded. Did He see a world in which inspiration could operate to produce an errorless biblical text, in which free humans, according to the soft libertarian definition of freedom, would write precisely His revealed truth, or did they manufacture some stories of their own, or due to common human dullness simply miss the nuance of a revealed truth, and, in spite of claims to the contrary, embed error into the text? And what, in God's knowledge, gives rise to all the possible worlds from which God selects? We know that nothing exists unless He brings it into being, so He must have seen, and known that He could create, an infinite number of possible things that ultimately would fail to accomplish His purpose. He must, thus, see Himself as possibly acting without wisdom and in failure of His ultimate purpose. Is it possible that God ever could see such a counterfactual?

Scripture focuses on God, not as an observer, but as constantly energized in the purposeful activity of accomplishing His will in the world. Scripture identifies God's foreknowledge with His decree without compromising the moral reality of all human feelings and actions. Both 1 Peter 1:1, 2 and Romans 8:28–30 place divine foreknowledge as an activity, not as a passive observation. It signifies an intimate and aggressive interest and purposed love that results in choosing, calling, sprinkling with Christ's blood, granting obedience, justifying, and glorifying.

The statement of the general principle behind all this is found in Ephesians 1:11, "Having been predestinated according to the purpose of

him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.” In the short space of a few words, God’s control of all events takes an uncompromising posture through the power of several words that describe how the elect come to have such privilege: “predestinated,” “purpose,” “works,” “all things,” “counsel,” and “will.”

Two examples must suffice. The contents of the Bible are given by revelation and reflect the truth about the world as God has always perceived it because it was a matter of His decree. As Paul wrote, “We impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. ... What God has prepared for those who love him, these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit” (1 Corinthians 2:7, 9, 10). God has always known what He would reveal as culminating in the Lord of Glory and His crucifixion. Not one word of God may be altered and it all is true, reflects what God had determined and was unfolded in progressive stages through history. None of the events recorded in Scripture could have failed to happen, none of the persons mentioned could have failed to be, for all of them relate to the appearance of Jesus as Son of God and Son of Man. The revelation is not just a reflection of what God saw, but of what God “decreed before the ages for our glory.”

Second, the prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah all the way from Genesis 3 to Malachi 4 indicate that He will be righteous, “the sun of righteousness with healing in its wings” (Malachi 4:2). In Jeremiah 23, God promises to “raise up for David a righteous Branch” who will be called “the Lord our Righteousness” (23:5, 6). It was His righteousness that qualified Him to die as a substitute for sinners. To this Jesus referred when He said, “For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors.’ For what is written about me has its fulfillment” (Luke 22:37). What Jesus accomplished by His obedience was a true righteousness, by an unflinching obedience to the will of His Father as expressed in Law and in the individual requirements for His life (e.g. Matthew 3:15; Philippians 2:8; Hebrews 1:9; 5:7–9), and was worthy of true praise. It is in fact such a righteousness as gains entrée before the Father on His throne of holiness in heaven (Hebrews 1:3, 4, 13; Romans 5:19). Though it was impossible for Christ in His human nature to fail, He has gained the credit of every unblemished act of His humanity as well as praise for the single unblemished posture of righteousness in heart, mind and deed. He could not sin, because, if He had sinned, the word of God as prophecy would have failed; He could not sin, because if He had sinned, the Person that was God would not have been holy, blameless, and undefiled (Hebrews 7:23–28); He could not sin, because God’s covenant with Abraham would have been broken (Isaiah 54); He could

not sin, because God decreed that “the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand” (Isaiah 53:10). On account of all these reasons and more, it was impossible for Christ to have been anything other than perfectly righteous. None of this eliminates the voluntary character of His obedience nor does its determined necessity eliminate the luster of His holy righteousness.

### Overcoming Grace

Keathley views God’s “Overcoming Grace” as monergistic but resistible [88, 125, 126]. Its monergism, according to Keathley’s perception, derives from the necessity of its preveniency, the scriptural insistence on grace alone, and the scriptural witness to our spiritual ineptness. Resistibility may be seen from a few things: one, the fact that the Scripture gives “too many examples of persons successfully resisting God’s grace” [123–24], two, God’s universal salvific will is not in fact accomplished, and three, His internal operations of grace, equal in their tendency to save in all who receive them sometimes do not result in salvation. Involved in the entire discussion is Keathley’s argument against regeneration as a precedent to faith. We are not saved unto faith but are saved by faith, justified by faith, receive eternal life as the end, not the cause, of our faith, are made sons of God by faith, and receive the new birth by faith [119–23]. Given all the combination of these facts, Keathley affirms that humans bear the “responsibility for not being chosen” [118] and asserts that “the distinction between an effectual and ineffectual call is found in the receiver, not the call itself” [126]. Good-bye monergism, fare-thee-well unconditionality.

The resistance to God’s call is universal and without interruption in the life of every child of Adam. Whether in nature, conscience, or special revelation, sinful man never ceases to resist God’s presentation of our duty to worship Him, repent of sin, and bow to the Lordship of Christ in His teaching, redemptive and ruling offices. Thus, when all others consider the gospel as foolishness or a stumbling block, a “call” of peculiar power both in quality and quantity distinguishes some hearers from others: “To them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” If all are called in the same way, Paul would be wrong to say that those called see Christ as power and wisdom, for most that are called do not. Paul uses the word “call” here to distinguish belief from unbelief. (1 Corinthians 1:24). To reaffirm the particularity of this call, Paul then relates God’s choice to the same group of people (1:27). When Keathley affirms that “unbelievers had the same grace available as believers, and this should have resulted in their conversion also” [130], he surely did not have in mind Paul’s view as expressed to the Corinthians.

The call of conscience and the same testimony of nature always find universal resistance; many, perhaps most, of these, moreover, do not have the call of a gospel ministry. And of those that hear the gospel and have the external call to believe its message that God, through Christ, will give eternal life to all that call upon Him, many will continue to believe a lie, while those whom God has chosen will be set apart unto belief of the truth of the gospel by the special operations of the Spirit. (1 Thessalonians 2:10–14). It is simply wrong to crumple saving grace to the same level as that manifest in the lives of unbelievers, so as to make the distinguishing factor between the lost and the saved a human rather than a divine element.

Keathley's efforts to argue that faith is prior to regeneration because we are saved by faith, justified by faith, and receive the gift of eternal life by faith, fails to distinguish between all these aspects of salvation and regeneration [121]. Identification of eternal life with regeneration [121f. "Regeneration is the act of the Holy Spirit whereby He imparts eternal life into a person ... This means that eternal life, i.e. regeneration, is not prior to conversion."], as well as with justification or the whole of salvation, does not engage the biblical distinctions between these ideas accurately. Regeneration is a theological term that in its strictest sense denotes that spiritual power operative at the threshold of the salvation experience referred to in Scripture as being "born again," being "quickened" or raised from spiritual death, or being "created in Christ Jesus." This is a sovereign, effectual, and mysterious divine activity independent of human initiative, effected by the Holy Spirit, on souls fitted for such a transformation by the truth of Scripture, and made legally possible by the acceptability of Christ's work in our stead. (John 3:3, 5; Ephesians 2:1–5, 10; 1 Peter 1:3, 18–25; 2 Peter 1:3). Eternal life, while given by earnest in this life (Ephesians 1:13, 14) is not strictly in our experiential possession until we enter into the objective reality of being before the face of God and in the glorious presence of Christ. This is our hope, presently within us, by promise, covenant, and the Spirit but fully to be realized later: "and this is the promise that he has promised us, even eternal life" (1 John 2:25); "the hope that is laid up for you in heaven" (Colossians 1:5); "thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life" (1 Timothy 6:19); "For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:11); "to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:4, 5); "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification

and its end, eternal life” (Romans 6:22). All of these biblical passages, plus more, indicate that our hope, our inheritance, the consummation of a life lived under the sanctifying influences of the Spirit, is eternal life. Though intrinsically involved in the eventual gaining of it (cf. 1 John 2:25 with 3:15), regeneration, though initiating the moral quality of which eternal life is the consummation, cannot be seen as synonymous with eternal life.

Keathley dismisses the importance of 1 John 5:1 on this issue by saying, “he [John] is distinguishing between true Christians and the break-away heretical groups who denied the incarnation.” Well, that is true, but that avoids the particular point at hand and does not answer the intention involved in the language of the text. John teaches by his grammar and overall theological context that belief in Jesus Christ is not the cause but the result of the new birth, in the same way that he teaches that doing righteousness is not the cause but the result, and thus an evidence, of the new birth (2:29) and not committing sin is not a cause but a result, and thus an evidence, of the new birth, and that our love for one another is not the cause of, but the result of, and thus the evidence of the new birth (4:7), and our overcoming the world is not the cause but the result, and thus an evidence, of the new birth (5:4). All of these tenses are perfect (“has been born of God”) meaning that the birth was an accomplished reality prior to and as a foundation of the subsequent activity (doing righteousness, not doing sin, loving, and believing in Christ, overcoming the world). John’s argument is related to his confidence that a true believer has an anointing from the Spirit (2:19, 20ff) and cannot fall away as do those that deny Christ, continue in sin, despise the brethren, and love the world.

Keathley also infers resistibility from the commands and questions God poses to Israel and to others that are under the influence of divine truth. “God’s questions make no sense if He was withholding some type of secret, inward irresistible grace” [123]. The conclusion is not as absurd as Keathley supposes, however, for God Himself eventually reveals that the inward change by a work of the Spirit is precisely what unbelievers need. Keathley omits any reference to God’s own affirmation of the need for a new covenant in which the human heart is changed from its fallen natural hardness, and thus consistently resistant to divine overtures, into a heart that yields to the holiness of the divine law, seeks forgiveness on holy principles, and desires a replication of God’s holiness (Jeremiah 31:31; Ezekiel 36:24–29a; John 3:3; Romans 7:5, 6) Keathley misapplies John 6:45, “They will *all* be taught by God,” as a universal and general *all*, that is, all being taught, but only some freely choosing to respond. Jesus seemed to have a scenario in mind different from that of Keathley. He viewed the concept of *taught* as a particular characteristic of the new covenant. He applied

it to those whom the Father has given Him and of whom He will lose none (6:37, 39). Since Jesus' words were such hard sayings, but filled with spiritual truth, only the Spirit could quicken one to receive such sayings (6:63) and only those given to Him by the Father would be quickened to come (6:65). Those are the ones about whom Jesus is speaking when He says, in fulfillment of the promise of the New Covenant, "They shall all be taught of God" (6:45 cf. Isaiah 54:13). Jesus is teaching that the promise of a true uncorrupted Israel established in righteousness (Isaiah 54:11, 12, 14) is now in the process of being gathered. Jesus issues the invitation to come and eat and drink (Isaiah 55:1, 2; John 6:35, 53–57) to receive the benefits of an everlasting covenant (Isaiah 55:3; John 6:38, 39); though it is held forth to the mass and prompts many rejections, God's word will accomplish that which it was sent forth to do (55:10,11). All of His people shall certainly be taught.

In short, Keathley's exposition of overcoming grace does not satisfy the biblical picture of a "call" that creates the status of believer (1 Corinthians 7:17–24).

### **Election, Eternal Life and Redemption**

Space forbids any more than brief comments on the other issues of ROSES according to Molinism. Keathley writes, "The Molinist affirms that the elect are saved by God's good pleasure. The distinctive difference between Calvinism and Molinism is that Calvinism sees God accomplishing His will through His omnipotent power while Molinism understands God's using His omniscient foreknowledge" [155]. Omniscience, even when Keathley rightly employs it as defining foreknowledge as opposed to Open Theism, does not equate the biblical word election. God's knowledge of all things future, according to Molinism, evokes an approval of one of the options He knows. This is endorsement of someone else's product, not election and purpose. The biblical language does not support the Molinist explanation of a wonderful phrase, "Sovereign Election." Moreover, the Calvinist view of election is not one of pure power, but of divine wisdom and purposive determination of God to glorify Himself in all things. The *execution* of creation, providence, and calling come from God's power (e.g. Ephesians 1:19; 3:7), but election itself flows from His wisdom (e.g. Ephesians 1:5, 8; 3:10).

Keathley's chapter on "Eternal Life," the certainty of final salvation for true believers is well done and has much that is edifying. He shows keen insight in some places. I would have some disagreements with sentences, emphases, or analyses at points, particularly his defense of the statement

“Assurance is the essence of saving faith.” His discussion of that, however, is too brief either to raise major objections or approve a systematic argument. Overall, I find much in this chapter that is helpful. There does not seem to be anything peculiarly Molinist about Keathley’s argument in this chapter for he does not argue for the view of perseverance that he says is consistent with middle knowledge [185–187].

Keathley’s treatment of atonement makes the point that not all Calvinists agree on the extent of the atonement and even those that affirm limited atonement define it in different ways. Admitting the truthfulness of that observation, I find much in this chapter that can be challenged. His expressed viewpoint on Romans 5 as to symmetry does not accomplish what he thinks. Keathley asserts that “the effects of Adam’s sin and of Christ’s atonement are symmetric and equal in extent,” [207] The participation of the “many” in Adam’s fall is universal and effectual without exception; the participation of the “many” in Christ’s death, is universal but not effectual without exception, for “the apostle stipulates the requirement of faith for receiving Christ’s benefits” [207]. So the symmetry is not equal in extent. Though Paul’s argument assumes a substantial symmetry, as Keathley rightly projects, Keathley’s view is certainly not Paul’s intended symmetry in the analogy he draws. Rather the symmetry of the analogy simply is this: All in Adam by covenant share his condemnation and the resultant corruption of nature; even so, all in Christ by covenant receive forgiveness and justification by His death, and the freeing of the soul from the corrupting slavery of sin.

Keathley’s rejection of the idea of double jeopardy [200–202] introduces some difficulties in his perceptions. He uses an illustration of a Presidential pardon granted, rejected by the prisoner, whose rejection was upheld by the Supreme Court. A person, therefore, may receive a pardon from a legitimate authority and, finding the conditions repugnant, refuse to receive it. A Presidential pardon, however, merely is an abstraction of executive authority and involves no moral ground for the pardon as it involves no payment for the crime; Christ did. A Presidential pardon provides no effectual means by which the offending criminal may be brought to admit his guilt; Christ’s death does (Romans 8:32). Since the propitiation was done “in his [Christ’s] own body on the tree,” a full payment that provides not only pardon but also all the influences and divine operations by which a sinner is brought to the full submission of trust in Christ, these things certainly will come to pass. When Christ died for the “world” [as defined in the discussion above], God, by Christ’s substitutionary death, did not impute their sins to them, thus, not only creating the moral foundation for pardon but removing the moral foundation for condemnation.

God thus reconciled us to Himself and from that reconciliation flow all blessings—new birth, rescue from corruption and the powers of this dark age, repentance, faith, justification, sealing, gifting, sanctification, discipline, cleansing of conscience, no fear of death, resurrection, glorification, and sight of His glory and the experience of eternal love. Ephesians 4 is an extended display of the entire spectrum of blessings intended for God’s people in the descent of Christ to earth, His resurrection and ascension, winning on the basis of His death all the gifts and graces by which all His captive people have Christ formed in them (Ephesians 4:1–16). Christ has died in such a way that no gap exists between His intent and His final accomplishment, between the sufficiency of His death and the efficiency of His death.

Other issues Keathley raises have been treated in the earlier portion of this response. Keathley has gained the appreciative support of some theologians, notably Paige Patterson among Southern Baptists, and should have the appreciation of all of us who are happy to see a vigorous engagement of a serious theological issue. To give such time and mental energy to an issue like *Salvation and Sovereignty* calls all concerned gospel believers to match Keathley’s sense of stewardship with determined intent to understand, to the glory of God and in the matchless richness of Holy Scripture, how God saves sinners. ☺

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