

The Founders Journal



Committed to historic Baptist principles

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Editorial Update

Tom Ascol

The first issue of the *Founders Journal* was published in the Spring of 1990. A second issue was published later that year and, after measuring the interest, the decision was made to continue publishing the journal on a quarterly basis thereafter. I agreed to serve as the editor of this new venture with Tom Nettles, Bill Ascol, Fred Malone and Ernest Reisinger serving as an editorial board.

Since that time the *Founders Journal* has been distributed throughout the world. We have heard from readers who reside in the most restricted Muslim nations in the world as well as in some of the remotest parts of the earth. It has been gratifying to see how the Lord has used the reach of these printed pages.

With the development of the Internet and the world wide web, Founders made the conscious decision to put all of the journal articles online for free in order to extend our usefulness more efficiently and widely. Though that decision made was not economically advisable (we were told), it fit perfectly with our vision to work for the recovery of the gospel and biblical reformation of local churches. Though it may be hard for some younger Southern Baptists to fathom, it was not that long ago that some pastors were actually terminated because they were discovered to have subscribed to the *Founders Journal*. More than a few pastors and church leaders read it discreetly.

The digital revolution and explosion of Internet accessibility eliminated many of those concerns and also facilitated the rapid and comparatively inexpensive spread of articles and written resources around the world. While it is undoubtedly true that some readers still do not have access to the Internet, and others who do still prefer the printed page to the pixelated one, the undeniable fact is that over the last several years most of our readers access the *Founders Journal* online rather than via their mailboxes.

For this reason, and in order to be faithful stewards of the resources entrusted to us for the work of reformation, this will be the last printed issue of the journal. We will still publish it quarterly, but only in a digital format. All of the articles will continue to be available on the Founders website, and we will also make each issue available for tablets and electronic readers.

I know that this will disappoint some of our loyal print readers and that is the last thing that we would ever want to do. Every reader is deeply appreciated. But in order for us to continue pursuing the purpose of Founders Ministries as effectively as we can, it is a decision whose time has come. Of course, I hope that you will continue to read the journal as it continues to be published online each quarter. And help us spread the word about its availability.

Check our website (wwwFOUNDERS.org) or sign up for our e-newsletter from the site in order to stay informed not only about upcoming issues but also about other developments in the continuing work of reformation. Thank you for your prayers and ongoing support. We have many reasons to be encouraged as well as much work that still needs to be done. ☺

Important Notice to Our Subscribers

This issue of the *Founders Journal* (Issue 87, Winter 2012) is our first digital issue. It is now available for download in our online store in both ePUB and mobi formats.

Beginning with our next issue (Issue 88, Spring 2012), the journal will only be available as a digital download. It will no longer be necessary to purchase a subscription. New issues will be announced in the Founders eNews and will be available for purchase to download for \$1.99 each in our online store (wwwFOUNDERSpress.com). We will continue to offer past issues of the journal free in PDF format.

News

New Founder Press eBook

On Earth As It Is In Heaven: Reclaiming Regenerate Church Membership by Wyman Richardson (Founders Press, 2011) is now available for download in our online store in two digital formats: ePub (for iBooks, the Nook and other ePub readers) and mobi (for Kindle and other mobi readers).

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The Compatibility of Determinism And Human Freedom

Bruce Ware

This article is Chapter Seven of the forthcoming book, *Whomever He Wills: A Biblical-Theological Defense of Our Sovereign God* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2012).

In his chapter, “Reflections on Determinism and Human Freedom,”¹ Jeremy Evans opens by asserting that the problem related to human free will and the nature of salvation is “not the compatibility of divine sovereignty and human freedom,”² since he claims to uphold the “comprehensive sovereignty”³ of God along with his own commitment to libertarian freedom.⁴ Rather, the problem is “whether we can make sense of the idea that human freedom and causal determinism are compatible.”⁵ A few pages later Evans states the main purpose of his chapter:

This chapter aims to provide some thoughts on why endorsing a strong Calvinist view of human freedom is unnecessary even when taking the problem of sin seriously. Again, I affirm the comprehensive sovereignty of God, which is compatible with human freedom, and deny the claim that *determinism* is compatible with human freedom.⁶

My chapter aims to show, contrary to Evans, that determinism and human freedom are compatible in that 1) their compatibility is necessary in order to account for Scripture’s own depictions of God’s dealings with free human beings, and 2) careful reflection and reasoning based on this biblical teaching undergirds what we see in Scripture, viz., that determinism and human freedom are compatible. We will consider first, then, (some, limited) evidence from Scripture that demonstrates the compatibility of determinism and free and responsible human choosing. Second, we will consider a select number of philosophical issues that relate to and flow out of this biblical teaching, showing that these serve to buttress and undergird what a careful reading of Scripture has already taught us, viz., that determinism and human freedom are compatible. The conclusion I hope to commend, then, is that the best and most faithful reading of the Bible, along with

careful reflections from reason, combine to demonstrate that determinism and human freedom are compatible.

The Compatibility of Determinism and Human Freedom Demonstrated from Select Passages of Scripture

Why would any thoughtful Christian hold the position that determinism is compatible with human freedom? The answer that some biblically minded Christians have given is this: determinism and human freedom are compatible at least insofar as the Bible demonstrates that *God's determination* of what people do is compatible with their carrying out those determined actions with *genuine human freedom and responsibility*. Passage after passage of Scripture⁷ leads to the conclusion that appeal either to God's determined will alone, or to human free choosing on its own, is inadequate in accounting for many actions that occur in the Scriptures. These passages demonstrate that one must appeal *both* to God's determined will along with human free choice(s) in order to give a full and accurate accounting of just what happened. But if this is the case—i.e., if one must appeal both to God's determined action along with human free action to explain why some event took place—then it is clear that these two together are real and really involved in what takes place; hence, they are compatible. Consider with me just a very small sampling of what we might call some clear compatibilist texts.

Exodus 3:21–22

First, early in the Book of Exodus, we learn some of God's plans for how He would deliver His people Israel from Egypt. Among the many ways God worked to make this happen is this remarkable detail: God said to Moses, "And I will give this people [Israel] favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty, but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and any woman who lives in her house, for silver and gold jewelry, and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians" (Exodus 3:21–22). It appears, then, that God was able to determine something to happen that required for its fulfillment people acting freely in doing what they most wanted to do. This event is not merely accounted for by appeal to God's foreknowledge. That is, God does not tell Moses merely that He knows that before Israel leaves, when the Israelite women ask their Egyptian neighbors for their gold, silver, and clothing that they will give these items to the Israelites. No, there is more than merely this. God tells Moses, "I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians," indicating that God causes something to happen within the Egyptians that leads them to make the choice to give of their wealth to the Israelites before they leave. So, it is not that God merely foreknows what the Egyptians

will do, but God determines (“I will give this people favor”) what the Egyptians will do. And yet, there is every reason to think that when the Egyptians give the Israelites of their wealth, as God has determined that they do, that the Egyptians did so freely. That is, they did exactly what they most wanted to do, while they also carried out what God determined that they do. It is apparent, then, that we have a case here of the compatibility of divine determinism and human freedom.

Allow me to press this point just a bit further. If you asked the question, “Why did the Israelites leave Egypt with silver, gold, and fine clothing from the Egyptians?” you have to give two (not one) answers to be complete. It won’t do merely to say, “The Egyptian women chose to give the Israelite women of their wealth,” or conversely, “God caused the Egyptian women to look with favor on the Israelite women so that when asked, the Egyptian women gave of their wealth.” Here’s the point: Both answers are true, but each is a partial truth. You have to give *both answers together* for the full accounting of what takes place, according to this text. Well, if it is the case that “the Egyptian women chose to give of their wealth” and “God caused the Egyptian women to give of their wealth” are both necessary accountings of the same event, and both true of the same event, then the two statements are compatible. But be clear on this: the first statement is one of the human freedom expressed by those Egyptian women, and the second statement is one of the determination of God to bring something to pass through these Egyptian women that He predicted He would do; hence, human freedom (of the Egyptian women giving of their wealth) and divine determination (God causing them to favor the Israelites) are compatible.

Isaiah 10:5–15

Second, God brought punishment upon the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah through the military conquests of foreign nations. He raised up the Assyrians against Israel who took Samaria, its capital city, captive in 722 B.C. And He raised up the Babylonians against Judah who took Jerusalem, its capital city, captive in 586 B.C. That it was *God* who brought about these actions of punishment is clear from innumerable passages, and that *free peoples* and nations carried out the military campaigns is also clear. God raised them up and used them to accomplish His determined will, yet they did what they most wanted when they pillaged Samaria and Jerusalem, respectively. God’s determination and human freedom, again, must be seen as compatible.

One passage in particular highlights just how astonishing this compatibility is. In Isaiah 10, we read:

Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger; the staff in their hands is my fury!
Against a godless nation I send him, and against the people of my wrath

I command him, to take spoil and seize plunder, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. 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; for he says: "Are not my commanders all kings? Is not Calno like Carchemish? Is not Hamath like Arpad? Is not Samaria like Damascus? As my hand has reached to the kingdoms of the idols, whose carved images were greater than those of Jerusalem and Samaria, shall I not do to Jerusalem and her idols as I have done to Samaria and her images?" When the Lord has finished all his work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, he will punish the speech of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the boastful look in his eyes. For he says: "By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I have understanding; I remove the boundaries of peoples, and plunder their treasures; like a bull I bring down those who sit on thrones. My hand has found like a nest the wealth of the peoples; and as one gathers eggs that have been forsaken, so I have gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved a wing or opened the mouth or chirped." Shall the axe boast over him who hews with it, or the saw magnify itself against him who wields it? As if a rod should wield him who lifts it, or as if a staff should lift him who is not wood! (Isaiah 10:5–15, ESV).

Notice two features of this account that are crucial to our understanding of God and His work in the world. 1) Consider first who the primary actor is who brings destruction on the people of Israel and Judah. Clearly, it is not Assyria, who is merely the "axe" and "saw" (10:15) whom God uses to bring about His work. No, the primary actor is God himself who devises and carries out this destruction of His own people through the instrumentality of the pagan nation of Assyria. That God is the primary actor is stressed in 10:5 where Assyria is the "rod of my [i.e., God's] anger," in 10:6 where God is said to "send" and "command" Assyria to do exactly what they do, in 10:12 where we read of the time when "the Lord has finished all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem," referring to God's work of punishment being completed through this pagan army, and in 10:15 where God is the subject who hews with the axe [Assyria] and wields the saw [Assyria], so that the boasting for what occurs should be attributed to the One who hews and wields, not to the mere instruments he uses.

2) Notice second the responsibility Assyria bears before God for the actions that they carry out, actions which fulfill the very determined will of God himself. Verse 12 gets to the heart of this where we read, "When the Lord has finished all his work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, he will punish the speech of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the boastful look in his eyes" (10:12). In other words, despite the fact that Assyria was fulfilling exactly what God ordained they do, and despite the fact that they were God's own instrument (His rod, and axe,

and saw) in carrying out God's determined will of judgment against His people, they nonetheless are held accountable for the arrogance of their heart and their lofty pride that led them to think that their superiority gave them the right to destroy what they viewed as the weak and despicable people of Israel.

So, here we have it: God has determined precisely what the Assyrians carry out, and yet God judges the Assyrians for the haughtiness of their hearts in doing what God determined they do. Because they did what they most wanted, with hearts and minds that conceived of their actions in ways that they chose, they acted freely. But clearly also God determined that they do exactly what they did, so much so that when their work of destruction is over, God will declare, "*the Lord* has finished *all his work* on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem" (10:12, italics added). That is, they did exactly what they most wanted to do while they also carried out what God determined that they do. Clearly, then, we have a case here of the compatibility of divine determinism and human freedom.

Before we leave this text, notice again that *two answers* are needed to the question: "Who brought this devastation upon the people of Israel?" One answer, "The Assyrians did, out of the haughtiness of their own hearts," is true. But another answer, "God did, by his determination to use Assyria as his instrument of judgment" also is true. In fact, either answer without the other is incomplete and misrepresents what this passage says really took place. But if both are true, and if both are necessary to give a full account of the destruction of Israel, then it is clear that the two answers together are compatible. The free and responsible actions of the Assyrians, as shown by their arrogant hearts conceiving and carrying out exactly what they most wanted to do, is fully compatible with God's determination to raise up Assyria, commanding and sending them to do exactly what God willed that they do. Divine determination and human freedom, then, are compatible.

Isaiah 44:28–45:4; Ezra 1:1

Third, Cyrus, king of the Medo-Persians, issued a decree that enabled the Israelite exiles in Babylon to return to Jerusalem in 538 B.C. to begin the process of rebuilding the temple. And of course, God predicted through the Prophet Jeremiah that He (God) would be the one who would bring them back to the land. In Jeremiah 24:6, God declared, "I will set my eyes on them [Israel] for good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up, and not tear them down; I will plant them, and not uproot them." And in Jeremiah 29:10, He promises, "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you [Israel], and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place." But the human instrument God used to make this happen was Cyrus. Interestingly, though, evidently Cyrus was unaware that he was being used of the Lord to bring about the fulfillment of this promise even as he issued his decree for the Israelites to return. Isaiah

tells us that God chose Cyrus as His instrument, to fulfill His promise to Israel:

[It is the LORD] who says of Cyrus, “He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose”; saying of Jerusalem, “She shall be built,” and of the temple, “Your foundation shall be laid.” Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed: “I will go before you and level the exalted places, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron, I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places, that you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by your name. For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know me” (Isaiah 44:28–45:4, ESV).

Cyrus is described as God’s “shepherd” (44:28), God’s “anointed” (45:1), who will fulfill all of God’s own purposes (44:28). So, God granted to Cyrus military victories enabling him to ascend to a position of world domination (45:1–3). Yet in all of this, even though Cyrus is blessed by God, anointed by God, and called by God to carry out God’s will for his people Israel, Cyrus doesn’t even know this God of Israel (Isaiah 45:4—“though you do not know me”), whose will he is carrying out.

To add to this, when the fulfillment of God’s promise commences and Cyrus does issue the decree by which Israel returns to the land, God moves Cyrus to do what he does. The Book of Ezra opens with these words, “In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing” (Ezra 1:1). We have again, here, an example of the compatibility of divine determinism and human freedom. Certainly God foreknew what He predicted, viz., that Cyrus would proclaim a decree by which the exiled Israelites would return to Jerusalem to rebuild its temple. But clearly what these passages describe involves more than mere foreknowledge. God works in a multitude of ways to bring to pass exactly what He has determined: He works to name Cyrus, to raise him up as king of the newly ascending nation of Persia, He gives military successes to Cyrus, He moves in his heart to assist the Jews in exile, and He stirred him up to write the proclamation he did. These are not matters merely of divine foreknowledge; these are matters of divine determination. And yet, would we want to deny that Cyrus acted freely? Certainly, he did what he most wanted as he assembled his military for various campaigns. He did what he most wanted as he made the proclamation for Israel to return. He did what he most wanted when he promised safe passage to the exiles as they made the long and dangerous journey back to Jerusalem. That

is, Cyrus did exactly what he most wanted to do, while he also carried out what God determined that he do. It appears, then, that we have a case here of the compatibility of divine determinism and human freedom.

Notice again that two answers are needed in explaining the return of the Jewish exiles to Jerusalem. Is it adequate to say merely that the Israelites returned because Cyrus proclaimed a decree promising them safety and supplies to travel to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple? Or is it adequate to say merely that God brought the exiled people of Israel back from Babylon to Jerusalem through the decree of Cyrus just as He promised and determined He would do? Each answer is true. But each answer, though true, is partial. Each is a necessary part of the full answer, but neither is sufficient in itself. A full accounting of why the exiles of Israel returned from Babylon to their homeland involves both answers. Both are true, and both are necessary elements of the full answer; hence, both answers are compatible as they together give the full reason for the Israelites return from exile. But the first answer appeals to the free decisions Cyrus made in choosing to send the exiles back to Jerusalem. And the second answer appeals to the determination of God to bring His people back from Babylon 70 years after they were deported, and to do so through the instrumentality of Cyrus, king of Persia. Well, if both answers are true, and if both answers are necessary for a full accounting of the events recorded in Scripture, and furthermore, if the first answer involves free human agency while the second answer involves divine determination, then it follows that free human agency and divine determination are compatible.

Acts 2:23; 4:27–28

Fourth, consider the words of Peter explaining how it was that Jesus, the Christ, was put on the cross. In two places early in the Book of Acts, he states:

this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men (Acts 2:23, ESV). ... for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place (Acts 4:27–28, ESV).

We've landed now at the central action carried out in all of human and cosmic history. The death of Christ on the cross is the single most important event to happen in all of the created order. So, it seems important that we have a clear understanding from Scripture just how it is that Jesus ended up on that cross. As we can see from the passages quoted, Peter gives us two, not just one, answers, both of which are necessary for a full accounting, and only together are they sufficient to explain who put Jesus on the cross.

One answer to the question of who put Jesus on the cross, of course, is this, “Wicked people put Him there.” That they are wicked is explicitly indicated in 2:23 where Peter says that Jesus was “crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men,” and it is implied by mentioning Herod, Pilate, Gentiles and Jews, all of whom said and did various expressions of hatred and evil in their giving up of Christ to be crucified. But another answer is also given by Peter: “God put Jesus on the cross according to His long-standing plan and purpose, and He did so through the agency of the wicked people who plotted and carried out His crucifixion.” Both statements by Peter stress that God acted according to the plan He already had in place of putting His Son on the cross, but the claim recorded in 4:27–28 says in addition that this plan was carried out precisely through and not apart from the very wicked acts of Herod, Pilate, Gentiles and Jews. So once again we see that two answers are needed to account for why Jesus was put on the cross. Wicked men put Him there, and God put Him there through the plans, words and deeds of these wicked men. Since both answers are true, and both are necessary for a full accounting of what took place, it follows that these two answers are compatible.

But what do these two answers involve? The first answer, that wicked people put Jesus on the cross, clearly involves the plans and actions of free moral agents. How could they be charged with being “lawless” were they not free in what they did? They are held responsible for their choices and actions, and hence all that they did was done by them freely. But the second answer, that God put Jesus on the cross according to this eternal plan and through the agency of wicked men, involves God’s determination of what He would do, a determination carried out precisely through and not apart from free moral agents. So here we have it: The free and responsible actions of the wicked men who schemed and nailed Jesus to the cross, as shown by their jealous and vengeful hearts conceiving and carrying out exactly what they most wanted to do, is fully compatible with God’s determination to put His Son on the cross, working through everything (“to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place”—Acts 4:28) they did to bring to pass exactly what God had willed from eternity past must take place. Divine determination and human freedom, then, are compatible.

Reasoned Reflections from the Teachings of these Compatibilist Texts

Oh so many more texts could be advanced in support of the claim that the Bible demonstrates that *God’s determination* of what people do is compatible with their carrying out those determined actions with genuine *human freedom and responsibility*. But these will suffice to show that a faithful reading of such texts requires the conclusion that we do indeed see compatibilism displayed in Scripture. Having seen some of the specific texts, I wish now to make some more general

observations and reasoned inferences from the teachings of these compatibilist texts of Scripture.

First, to avoid this compatibilist conclusion, someone might challenge one or both of its central claims. One could challenge, on the one hand, whether or not the human agents involved really could act freely after God had determined to bring to pass the very things that they chose to do. Or, on the other hand, one could challenge whether God actually had determined what would take place through those very human agents.

Regarding the first option, to go this route is sobering when one begins to take a fuller accounting of all of the compatibilist texts there are in the Bible! Will this become the norm in solving this problem, i.e., that if God has determined something, then the people who carry out what God determined did not act freely? I think one will find soon that this will not work well in trying to avoid compatibilism. Too many passages, including ones we've seen here, make clear that God determines what someone does, and yet they are held responsible for their actions. Recall the Assyrians who carry out precisely what God raised them up and called them to do, and yet when they have finished their brutal work (better: when God's ordained work of judgment through them is done), God judges them for the arrogance that led them to carry out what He determined that they carry out. Recall the wicked men who put Christ on the cross. Are we to conclude that since they carried out exactly what God ordained ("to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place"—Acts 4:28), that they did not act freely and responsibly? No, everything about these compatibilist texts indicates that both of these realities are simultaneously true: 1) God planned and determined what would take place in such a way that His determination included the very people through whom it would take place, and 2) moral agents marked by genuine freedom⁸ and responsibility for their actions carried out exactly what they most wanted to do, and in this they were free as they carried out what God determined they do.

And what of the second option, of denying that there is real divine determination here. Recall a point made earlier: Since God declares in advance not merely what will take place (as though He was relying only on His exhaustive foreknowledge), but He declares in advance what He will do to make it take place including determining those through whom it will take place ("I will give this people favor"—Exodus 3:21; "I send him [Assyria] ... I command him [Assyria]"—Isaiah 10:6; "He [Cyrus] is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose"—Isaiah 44:28; "delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God"—Acts 2:23; "to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place"—Acts 4:28), the conclusion that God determined their actions is simply unavoidable. So here we have it, genuine human freedom and divine determination are both simultaneously true of what took place, and only with both together

are they sufficient in giving a full accounting of what took place; hence, divine determination and human freedom are compatible.

Second, an important distinction needs to be made. We dare not reduce the description of compatibilism being made here to a claim of what might be called a “co-agency of (mere) collaboration.” By co-agency of collaboration (or collaborative co-agency) I have in mind a situation where two or more parties both work in carrying out some task, and both together are required to accomplish the task, yet each acts independent from any determining influence from/on the other even as they work together. As an example of such collaborative co-agency, consider this scenario: Sally’s car is stuck in the snow and she cannot get it free. Sam and Fred, driving past, see her distress and stop. Sam gets out and pushes Sally’s car as Sally tries again to move it forward, but it remains stuck. Fred gets out and joins Sam in pushing, and now the car is loosed so Sally is able to drive free. In such a case, while it is true that Sam and Fred collaborated (lit: they co-labored) in pushing Sally’s car, and both Sam’s and Fred’s actions must be taken together to account for freeing the car, it is not the case that Fred determined Sam’s actions or that Sam determined Fred’s actions. Each person acted independently of any determining influence by the other, even though it is only as they acted together in collaboration that we can account fully for the task being accomplished.

Such mere collaborative co-agency is not sufficient, though, to explain the many compatibilist texts of Scripture. It is not merely the case, for example, that the Assyrians engaged in warfare against Israel, while God, acting independent of Assyria’s activities and with no determining influence over Assyria’s actions, works to use these actions as a fitting judgment on His disobedient people. Put differently, it is not the case that God saw what the Assyrians were plotting and thought to Himself, “Well, isn’t this convenient! Since the Assyrians are planning on destroying Israel (and of course, I have nothing to do with the plans they are making or whether/how they carry them out), I can collaborate with them and use their actions as a means of bringing My judgment upon My people.” Such a notion misses entirely one of the elements central to the compatibilist texts of Scripture. It is not merely that God acts, and human moral agents act, and it is only as one considers both actions together that one can account for what took place. Rather, although compatibilism involves co-agency, to be sure, it is not merely a co-agency of collaboration. Rather, the co-agency of compatibilism (or compatibilist co-agency) necessarily involves the two elements of *determination* and *freedom*. Compatibilist co-agency understands 1) God as agent determining what, when, and how something will take place along with determining those free agents through whom His plan and work will be accomplished, in conjunction with 2) free moral agents who make their decisions in keeping with their own natures and their highest desires, all the while choosing to do precisely what God has determined that they do.

To make sure the importance of this distinction is clear, consider again how we answer the question, “Who put Christ on the cross?” A biblically faithful response will involve two answers, as we saw above: 1) wicked men put Christ on the cross, and 2) God put Christ on the cross. Thus far our two answers, though correct as far as they go, lack a precision and specificity that Acts 2:23 and 4:27–28 would want to include. As our answers stand now, they could be interpreted as expressive merely of a co-agency of collaboration, i.e., it is both true that certain human moral agents and God the Father did their own respective parts which, together, accounts for putting Christ on the cross. While true as far as this goes, what is lacking here is the determinative connection between the agency of the wicked men and their actions, and the agency of God who planned, purposed and predestined exactly what took place through these wicked men and their actions. So, for a fully faithful account of these texts, and to provide a more careful and precise biblical response, here is how the co-agency of compatibilism would reply to the question of who put Christ on the cross: 1) wicked men acted out of the hatred and jealousy of their own natures, devising and doing what they most wanted, with the aim and result of putting Christ on the cross, and 2) God determined that His Son would die an atoning death on a cross, and to bring this to pass He planned and predestined what wicked men would carry this out along with all of the actions they would do to accomplish this, such that as they acted freely in putting Christ on the cross they fulfilled precisely what God determined they do. This, then, is the co-agency of compatibilism that we find in so many passages of Scripture. Given the biblical testimony that the determination of God is compatible with free human choices and actions that carry out the pre-determined will of God, we accept, then, these truths as demanded by a faithful and careful reading of Scripture.

Before leaving the distinction between collaborative and compatibilist co-agency, it should be observed that there is an element couched within the co-agency of compatibilism that needs to be brought out into the open—a feature that is implicit in what we’ve just seen that we need now to make explicit. While the co-agency of compatibilism truly is a form of co-agency, it does not mean that each of the actions has equal priority or equal ultimacy in what takes place. This (equal priority and equal ultimacy of the two actions) may be the case, and often is, with the co-agency of collaboration, but it never is the case with compatibilist co-agency. To see this, consider again the question, “Who put Christ on the cross?” As observed above, we need two answers (not just one), expressing the co-agency involved: “Wicked men did,” and “God did.” But, that one of these answers has priority over the other, that one has an ultimacy that the other lacks, must also be seen. Consider this: Do both of these answers stand in equal causal relation to each other, or does one of these two answers give rise to and account for the other? While it is true that the answers “Wicked men did” and “God did” both are

needed to answer, “Who put Christ on the cross?” it is also clear that one of these answers has priority over the other, that only one has an ultimacy that the other lacks. The choices of wicked men to put Christ on the cross took place *because of* the prior and ultimate determination of God to put His Son on the cross by the hands of these godless men. So, while both answers are needed for a full accounting of what took place, the co-agency of compatibilism is evident here precisely in that one of those answers, and not the other, stands as the ultimate answer, the one that has priority and primacy in relation to the other. *Because* God determined long ago to put His Son on the cross by the hands of these godless men in the ways they did, therefore these men chose and acted as they did, out of their natures freely, while fulfilling what God had determined that they do.

Fourth, the kind of human freedom at work in compatibilism needs to be explicated more clearly. Thus far, I have purposely avoided giving an explicit definition to “freedom” or “free will” because I wanted the compatibilist texts of Scripture to demonstrate that somehow, in some way, it must be the case that determinism and human freedom are compatible. That is, if Scripture is allowed simply to be read and understood for what it says, it seems clear in many, many texts that two things have to be accepted as true: 1) God has determined what human agents carry out, and 2) those human agents who carry out what God has determined are held responsible for their actions. But, if these human agents are morally responsible before God for what they do, they should best be understood as free in doing what they do, despite the fact that they are carrying out what God determined they do. So, while we may not yet understand the sense in which they are free and morally responsible for their actions when they carry out what God has determined they do, nonetheless we need to see and accept that somehow, in some way, because they are morally responsible, they must be seen as genuinely free.

Why allow Scripture first to demonstrate the compatibility between determinism and some sense of human freedom before defining what that freedom is? This is exactly where many discussions of whether determinism and human freedom are compatible go astray from the very outset, in that they begin with a definition of “freedom” that is, of necessity, *incompatible* with determinism. So, the text is never allowed to correct this assessment, because the text cannot be examined without this incompatibilist definition of freedom already in mind and already established. So instead here, we have seen from looking at texts of Scripture that determinism and freedom *are* compatible, and we were not forced to deny what is evident in these texts by imposing a definition of freedom that would have ruled out from the get go their compatibility—which compatibility is required from a fair and honest reading of those texts.

What is the understanding of freedom often assumed that of necessity rules out and denies compatibilism, and what understanding of freedom best accords with the compatibilism seen in these texts? We’ll take these in order.

1) The sense of freedom often asserted from the outset, and one that surely is incompatible with determinism, is often called “libertarian freedom.” The libertarian notion of freedom asserts the supposed “power of contrary choice,” viz., that an agent is free in making a choice if and only if, at the moment he makes that choice, he could have chosen contrary to what in fact he did choose. David Basinger, a libertarian himself, writes that proponents of libertarian freedom hold that “given the conditions preceding any voluntary decision, more than one decision must be possible—the person making the decision must be in a position to choose differently.”⁹ Or again, libertarians hold the view that “some human actions are chosen and performed by the agent without there being any sufficient condition or cause of the action prior to the action itself.”¹⁰ By “sufficient condition or cause,” Hasker is claiming that none of the factors or conditions present when a choice is made, nor any set of those factors or conditions, will necessitate *just this choice and not another*. In other words, libertarian freedom asserts, then, that when making a libertarianly free choice, at the exact moment of choosing with all things being just what they are at that moment, none of the conditions true then, nor any set of those conditions, requires the agent to make just one choice, but rather given those exact conditions, he could choose one thing or something to the contrary.

Although this view of freedom is widely held and even wildly popular in some circles, it is highly questionable whether the libertarian notion of freedom is coherent. I have argued elsewhere¹¹ that though the libertarian notion of freedom has an intuitive appeal and initial sense of reasonableness, that on examination it proves to fail altogether to account for why persons do what they do. In summary, here’s the problem: if at the moment that an agent chooses A, with all the conditions being just what they are when the choice is made, he could instead have chosen $\neg A$ or B, then it follows that any reason or set of reasons the agent would give for why he chose A would be the *identical reason or set of reasons* for why instead the agent might instead have chosen $\neg A$ or B. But if the reason(s) for A are identical to those for $\neg A$ or B, then there is no answer to the question, “Why did the agent choose A *instead of* $\neg A$ or B?” or “Why might the agent have chosen $\neg A$ or B *instead of* A?” If the reasons are identical for why the agent might choose A, on the one hand, or $\neg A$ or B, on the other hand, then there is no explanation at all for why the agent chose just what he did. Hence, this view of freedom fails altogether to explain why we do what we do, and since it cannot give a causal explanation for effects (choices) that take place, it proves to be incoherent as a conception of human volition.

Despite this major problem with libertarian freedom, it remains the prevailing view of freedom among many, including many Christians. I won’t speculate here just why this may be the case, but I will turn now to this central point: all parties agree—both libertarians and non-libertarians—that if the kind of freedom we have is libertarian freedom, then we must conclude that determinism is flatly

incompatible with human freedom. Here's why: If God has determined that a human agent do A, then it must be the case that he will do A. But if he must do A and he cannot do $\neg A$ or B, then he is not (libertarianly) free. Or from the other direction: If an agent possesses libertarian freedom and so has the power of contrary choice, then when he does A, it must be the case that he could have done instead $\neg A$ or B, and hence it cannot be the case that he was determined to do just A, or $\neg A$, or B. Libertarian freedom, then, by its very nature as defined by its advocates, stands completely contrary to compatibilism. Yes, some things can be determined, but if they are, they cannot be carried out (libertarianly) freely. Or some things can be carried out (libertarianly) freely, but if they are, they cannot have been determined. Every human choice and action is either (libertarianly) free, or determined, but it cannot be both.

In light of this, it does seem disingenuous, then, for Jeremy Evans, an advocate of libertarian freedom, to affirm, as quoted earlier, "the comprehensive sovereignty of God, which is compatible with human freedom."¹² Does not the word "comprehensive" in the phrase "comprehensive sovereignty" mean that it includes everything? But is it not the case that for any and all libertarianly free actions done by moral creatures, that God does not and cannot exert any control over just what happens? Isn't this at the heart of the solution to the problem of evil as libertarians conceive it—that God should not be held accountable for evil done by His moral creatures, since they brought about the evil that they did with libertarian freedom such that God could not prevent (without destroying their libertarian freedom) them from doing it? And just imagine for a moment how many morally free creatures there are in the world at any given time and how many free choices and actions these moral creatures make every moment, every hour, every day—*none of which God can control*. And yet to call God's sovereignty "comprehensive" seems to stretch its definition beyond any reasonable limit. Better yet, it would seem to me, would be to simply tell the truth—Evans' view is one in which God sovereignly made a choice to restrict the extent of His own sovereignty when He chose to create creatures with libertarian freedom. To the extent that they make their choices and carry out their actions with this libertarian freedom (which accounts for a huge percentage of what takes place in human history!), God does not and cannot sovereignly control what they do. To be sure, He can attempt to influence, and He can respond, but one thing He cannot do is ensure that what He wants to take place (or not take place) will happen (or not happen) if libertarianly free creatures are responsible for what is done. Well, then, it seems that libertarian freedom is not only incompatible with determinism, it also is incompatible with the comprehensive sovereignty of God, despite protestations to the contrary.

In light of the biblical study above, though, we have seen that the Bible demonstrates over and over again human choices and actions for which those human agents are held morally responsible while it also is the case that what they choose

and do fulfill exactly what God had determined. We have seen, that is, that compatibilism is demonstrated from Scripture, that divine determination and human morally free choice and action both happen together. Yet, if libertarian freedom, by definition, is contrary to compatibilism and cannot account, then, for what we see demonstrated in Scripture, it behooves us to consider another understanding of human freedom—one that both accounts for why we do what we do as free human agents, and one that accords with the compatibilism that Scripture demonstrates.

2) Another sense of human freedom, and one that is compatible with divine determinism while also accounting for why we choose and act as we do, is sometimes called, “freedom of inclination.”¹³ According to this view of freedom, an agent is free in making a choice if and only if, at the moment he makes that choice, he is not constrained or coerced in his choosing but rather chooses according to his *deepest* desire, his *strongest* inclination, or according to what he most wants. Of course, since the agent chooses according to his deepest desire or strongest inclination, it makes no sense to imagine that his freedom consists in his ability to do otherwise—right? If his deepest desire and strongest inclination is to choose A, then what sense does it make to say that he might, instead, have chosen –A or B? Why would he choose contrary to his *deepest* desire or *strongest* inclination? What sense does that make? For to choose –A or B would be to choose against what may be thought to be his highest desire, but if he really did that, then his choice of –A or B would actually be the choice that he desired most! The simple way to understand freedom of inclination is this: as morally free agents, we always choose and do what we most want. That is, when all of the various factors that go into our choosing have weighed in, as it were, our minds eventually settle on the one thing that we desire the most. Our freedom, then, is seen in just this: we think and consider and plan and muse, but in the end, we make a choice—a choice that represents our deepest desire, our strongest inclination, or more simply, what we most want.

Now, it should be clear that we may have, and often do have, competing desires as we endeavor to “make up our minds.” Consider the dieter (my apologies to some readers for this illustration). He may desire the chocolate cake, and the berry pie, and strawberry shortcake, and he may also desire to stay on his diet and refuse them all. Clearly, he has competing desires. Yet, it is also clear that he will make one (and only one) choice. After thinking, and musing, and listening to other’s comments, and considering his prior commitments, etc., he will eventually do the one thing that he most wants. Let’s say that his diet has been going well, and he is with people who have encouraged him in the gains (losses!) he’s seen, and he chooses to refrain. There can be no doubt but that he had other desires strongly at work in him. But it is also just as sure that he acted according to only one of those desires, the desire that prevailed in his own mind and heart as he considered all of

the factors. His freedom, then, was seen in his ability to choose and act according to his strongest inclination, not in some supposed power of contrary choice.

How, then, is freedom of inclination compatible with divine determinism? To the extent that God is able to know all of the factors that go into our minds formulating the strongest inclinations for our choices, He also is in a position to influence those factors and by that, He can ensure what strongest inclination will actually come to pass in our minds and hearts. Something like this must have happened with the Egyptian women who gave their silver, gold, and fine clothing to the Israelites—right? As you recall, God said, “I will give this people [Israel] favor in the sight of the Egyptians” (Exodus 3:21) indicating some work in them that would incline their hearts to want, as their strongest inclination, to do what otherwise one would never expect them to do, viz., give of their wealth to the Israelites. Something like this must have taken place in God’s work with the Assyrians. God not only controlled many factors that resulted in their military successes and ascendancy over other nations, but He also knew that through these military triumphs Assyria would grow haughty and so would develop a highest inclination to destroy the Israelites. At least we know this—the Bible does not indicate merely that God knew that Assyria would destroy Israel, but the Bible indicates that God raised up Assyria, commissioned Assyria, to do just what they did. This requires some means God used in the hearts and minds of these Assyrians to assure that what they most wanted—what became, over time, their deepest desire and strongest inclination—was exactly what God determined that they do. Yet, because they did exactly what they most wanted, they are held morally responsible for their actions, even though what they did actually fulfilled the prior determination of God.

And of course, in order for God to bring about some of His determined ends, He must grant to us altogether new inclinations (the “new hearts” of Ezekiel 36:26), since none of our inclinations, by our old natures, would ever choose to do what God has called us to do. Here is the marvel and the miracle of God’s gracious effectual calling and the new birth. Whereas before we were born again, our highest inclinations were always, in one form or another, to turn from God and reject the gospel of Christ (e.g., Romans 8:6–8; 1 Corinthians 1:18–25), now, by His work of grace and the renewing work of the Spirit, God brings about in His elect a new heart that manifests a new strongest inclination and deepest desire to turn from sin to the very Christ we formerly despised. The opening of our blind eyes (2 Corinthians 4:4–6) is the very work of God to grant us desires for Him and longings for Christ we did not have before.

So we see, then, that because our freedom is a freedom of inclination, and because the sovereign God is able to influence those factors that give rise to our highest inclinations—either mildly through monitoring factors that affect our inclinations, or more radically through giving us altogether new inclinations through

new minds and new hearts—we are able to affirm together that God is able to determine what free creatures carry out. There is no conflict in this assertion, and most importantly, it is an assertion based squarely on the teaching of God’s Word.

Conclusion

There is much, much more that could be said at this point, but not all can be done or said in one article or chapter. What we have been able to see, though, is remarkable biblical testimony of the fact that *God’s determination* of what people do is compatible in Scripture with their carrying out those determined actions with genuine *human freedom and responsibility*. How remarkably clear Scripture is, if we but let it speak for itself. Yes, both divine determination of free actions, and the genuine freedom and moral accountability of those actions, go together in the teaching of Scripture, and so they must go together in the theology of our minds and hearts.

We are not in a position, then, where we need to choose one over the other. If God determines something to take place, and this only occurs as human agents bring those determined actions to pass, we do not have to conclude that they could not have been free. Or if we see moral human actions that bring moral accountability for what was done, we do not have to reject God’s determinative influence in what took place. Rather, as we see over and again throughout the Bible, God is able to determine the events of history, and the actions of innumerable moral creatures. But, while this is true, these actions also take place as His moral creatures choose and act according to their deepest desires and strongest inclinations, thus acting in genuine freedom and moral accountability, yet all the while they are carrying out exactly and precisely what God, long ago, planned and determined that they do. That both are true is crystal clear in the Bible, if passages are allowed to be read and understood for what they say. Since both divine determination and moral freedom and responsibility are taught in Scripture, and since both, then, are true and compatible, may we, with humility, make and fulfill this pledge: What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder. For the glory of God, and to the end of understanding better who we are before this Sovereign, may this be so. 🐣

Notes:

¹ Jeremy A. Evans, “Reflections on Determinism and Human Freedom,” in David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke, eds., *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism* (Nashville, TN, B&H: 2010) 253–274.

² *Ibid.*, 253.

³ *Ibid.*, 255.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 253–254

⁵ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 255–256 (italics in original).

⁷ One should bear in mind that even if only one passage of Scripture, rightly and best understood, indicates that God’s determined will that some certain action take place, and human free and responsible choosing to carry out that divinely determined action also takes place, then determinism and human freedom are compatible. That is, either they’re compatible or they’re not; if even one passage indicates that they are compatible, then they are compatible. But the reality we face in Scripture is that many such “compatibilist” texts are present, though in the space this article affords, we’ll look only at four of these.

⁸ I’ll return below to just what this freedom is.

⁹ David Basinger, *The Case for Freewill Theism: A Philosophical Assessment* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 26.

¹⁰ William Hasker, *Metaphysics: Constructing a Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1983), 32, quoted in Evans, “Reflections on Determinism and Human Freedom,” 253.

¹¹ See my *God’s Greater Glory: the Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004) 61–95, esp. 85–88.

¹² Evans, “Reflections on Determinism and Human Freedom,” 255–256.

¹³ For further discussion, please see my *God’s Greater Glory*, esp. 78–84.

Why I’m Still a Baptist

Robert R. Gonzales, Jr.

Some of my best friends and my most admired heroes of the Christian faith believe in the practice of baptizing infants and bringing them into the membership of the church apart from any profession of faith. My love and respect for these dear brothers and venerable men of God has on more than one occasion inclined me to reconsider whether they’ve got it right and I’ve got it wrong.

But after “revisiting” the issue several times, I’m still a Baptist. I could offer several reasons. But one reason involves the teaching of a text that’s often overlooked in the Infant Baptism (Paedobaptism) vs Believer Baptism (Credobaptism) debate. That text is John 1:12–13. I’d like to make three observations on this text and explain why I believe it doesn’t support the idea of baptizing non-professing children of believers and bringing them into the membership of a New Covenant church.

Conferral of covenant sonship status under the New Covenant is limited no longer to the Jewish nation and is predicated no longer on natural descent but on supernatural descent, the fruit and evidence of which is saving faith in Jesus the Messiah. This is the point made by the apostle John when he writes, “But to as

many as received Him, He granted the legal warrant to become children of God, even to the ones who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the decision of a husband, but of God (John 1:12–13; author’s translation). Consider the following three observations and their implication for infant baptism and church membership.

A Shift in the “History of Salvation”

The reader should note that the primary theme of John 1:1–18 is the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among men. This is obviously a historical event and it marks a new epoch in the history of redemption. The apostle notes this epochal shift when he asserts, “The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” John’s reference to Moses alludes to a great event in redemptive history, viz, God redeeming His people from Egypt mediated through Moses and later revealed in the Law. That great redemptive event, however, would pale in comparison to the second great redemptive event. Indeed, the first great event was merely a shadow of the second great event. Now God would redeem His people from their sins by the hand of one greater than Moses (cf. Deuteronomy 18:15ff.; Hebrews 3:1–7). The Son of God would come and ratify a New Covenant with His own blood.

So what we have here are two mediators, two covenants and two canons! The “law” is the Old Testament canon completed. “Grace and truth,” refer to a New Covenant canon, not yet completed but anticipated and presupposed. Moreover, John’s purpose in this passage is to highlight the superiority of the New Covenant and its Mediator. The Old Covenant contained grace and truth (Exodus 34:4–7). That grace and truth, however, was promissory in form. God’s people could not look directly at His glory, but they could only see it as it was reflected from Moses’ face. Even then there was a veil over his face, because God’s people were not ready for the full revelation of God’s glory (Exodus 34:29–35).

But in the fullness of time God sent forth His Son, the Word. Now the veil will be taken away from the Law of Moses. Now God’s people are ready to see God’s glory in all of its fullness. Note verse 14: “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Now grace and truth are no longer in the promissory form of the Old Testament. Now they’re in the fulfillment form of the incarnate Son of God—the Mediator of a better covenant. Instead of sending Moses down from the mountain in order to reflect His glorious grace and truth, God Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, has come down from the mountain. Note the declaration of verse 18: “The only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained [i.e., revealed] Him.” Jesus Christ Himself is the New Covenant Word from God.

What, therefore, verses 10–12 describe are human responses to this redemptive-historical event. “The world did not know Him” (v. 10), “His own people did not receive him” (v. 11), and “but as many as received Him” (v. 12) refer primarily those historical human responses that have followed in the wake of this new and greatest of all redemptive events—God become flesh in the person of Christ. Thus, verses 12 and 13 are not merely rehearsing God’s way of grace throughout the ages (e.g., God’s work of grace in Abraham, Moses and David) but are concerned primarily with a new state of affairs introduced by the coming of Christ and inauguration of the New Covenant. Now what once characterized only a remnant within God’s Old Covenant family will now be the rule characterizing the members of the New Covenant family. Unfortunately, as William Hendrickson notes, “The Jew was very slow to learn that in *the new dispensation* there are no special privileges based upon physical relationships” (emphasis added).¹ Therefore, when a Paedobaptist (i.e., one who advocates infant baptism) asserts that John’s teaching in 1:12–13 “was true in the Old Covenant; this is nothing new,” it seems to me that he betrays an insensitivity to the clear redemptive-historical emphasis of John’s doctrine.

Accordingly, the passage is not simply explaining the “way of salvation” (*ordo salutis*), that is, God’s method of saving sinners at all times; it’s primarily highlighting a shift in redemptive history (*historia salutis*), that is, God’s manner of administrating the paradigm of redemption (commonly called the Covenant of Grace) in history.

Adoption: Legal Covenantal Status

The rendering of the Authorized Version, “to them gave he power to become the sons of God,” has suggested to some that verses 12–13 are dealing exclusively with regeneration. The Greek term translated “power,” however, is ἐξουσία (*exousia*), not δύναμις (*dunamis*). The latter would connote revivification and be consonant with the grace of regeneration. The former denotes legal authority and/or privilege. This is noted by Leon Morris who writes, “John does not speak of power, as in the sense of power of sin (though in fact they receive that too). His thought is that of status. They have received full authority to this exalted title. He does not say ‘to be’ but ‘to become.’ Not only is there a status, but there is a change of status.”² Albert Barnes argues similarly and prefers to translate ἐξουσίαν as “privilege.” He then identifies this privilege as the legal status of adoption.³ Barnes is not without support from other commentators. John Calvin uses the term “adoption” at least four times in his exposition of verses 12 and 13.⁴ Professor John Murray lists John 1:12–13 among “the most important passages in the New Testament bearing upon adoption.”⁵ He argues,

In John 1:12 he speaks of giving authority to become sons of God. Sonship, he indicates, is instituted by the bestowment of a right and this is to be distinguished from the regeneration spoken of in verse 13. When we apply John's own teaching elsewhere to this passage we are compelled to discover the following progression of logical and causal relationship—regeneration (v. 13), the reception of Christ, the bestowment of authority, and becoming thereby children of God (v. 12)... In a word, the representation of Scripture is to the effect that by regeneration we become members of God's kingdom, by adoption we become members of God's family.⁶

One should note how Murray connects the blessing of adoption with membership in God's covenant family. Robert Peterson builds on Murray's insights and remarks,

Adoption and regeneration are two ways of describing how we enter the family of God.... In regeneration, [God] begets his children, giving new life to those who were spiritually dead. In adoption, the Father places adult sons and daughters, former children of the devil, in his family. Adoption is a legal action, taking place outside of us, whereby God the Father gives us a new status in his family.⁷

So the grace bestowed in verse 12 is "adoption" in contrast with the grace effected in verse 13, which is "regeneration."⁸ Of course, as the writers above note, John ties both salvific blessings together. This new covenant family status is conferred on believers (v. 12) whose very faith is itself the fruit or evidence of a supernatural work of God's regenerating grace (v. 13). Thus, this newly conferred covenant status is not the product of human merit but of divine bestowal.

Nevertheless, since verse 13 stands grammatically in subordination to verse 12, the emphasis is not so much upon God's inward work of regeneration but rather upon *God's subsequent conferral of legal status upon regenerate believers*. And if John is not merely alluding to the *ordo salutis* but rather to a new stage in redemptive history, then his emphasis on a circumcised heart expressed by faith in Christ as the condition for the divine conferral of a new covenant-familial status suggests a qualitative difference between *the constitutional makeup* of the Old Covenant people of God, with the most of whom God was not well-pleased (1 Corinthians 10:1–5), and the New Covenant people of God, who, as a rule, are truly "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession," marked by the fact that God has not merely called them out of Egypt to Canaan but "out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

Consequently, the passage is not merely referring to the divine causation of a moral change in individuals, that is, regeneration; it's primarily highlighting a divine conferral of *legal covenantal status*, that is, adoption.

Legal Basis of Covenant Status: Supernatural Descent

If, as argued above, John's focus is not merely on the *ordo salutis* but primarily on the *historia salutis*, then verse 13 takes on new significance. Salvation has always been by grace through faith in the promised Offspring. More specifically, God has always called for a circumcised heart that gives rise to faith and genuine piety (Genesis 15:6; Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4, 14). But one might lawfully belong to Abraham's "seed" and to the nation of Israel via the circumcision made with hands without the new birth. Hence, God confers upon the nation of Israel as a whole and indiscriminately the status of sonship (Exodus 4:22; Deuteronomy 14:1; Hosea 11:1; Romans 9:4).

This redemptive-historical state of affairs, however, has changed with the coming of Christ, says John. Not only does God convey His grace and truth through a better mediator than Moses (see above). Now God will limit the conferral of legal covenant status to those upon whose heart His law is written, who know Him, and whose sins He has forgiven (Jeremiah 31:31–34). To use the language of John, "To as many as received" the Son of God incarnate (v. 12). Hence, natural descent, the pride of the Jewish people, no longer counts. As Calvin observes,

The universal term 'as many' implies an antithesis: the Jews were carried away by a blind glorying, as if God were restricted to them alone. So the Evangelist declares that their lot has changed; the Gentiles have succeeded to the place left empty by the disinherited Jews. It is just as if he transferred the rights of adoption to strangers.⁹

So the legal right of entrance into the covenant family of God is no longer predicated on physical descent or outward circumcision. Instead, "Whosoever received Him," notes Ryle, whether "Pharisees, Sadducees, learned or unlearned, male or female, Jews or Gentiles, to them He gave the privilege of sonship to God."¹⁰ Hence, with the coming of Christ, God has reconstituted His covenant household. He has indicated through the pen of His inspired apostle that warrant for inclusion within His "covenant household" (see Ephesians 2:19) is predicated no longer on natural descent on faith and the new birth but on supernatural descent, the fruit and evidence of which is saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Implications for New Testament Baptism and Church Membership

What are the implications for the New Covenant rite of baptism and church membership status? According to one Paedobaptist pastor,

The passage teaches nothing concerning 'baptism,' the sign, but is concerned with the grace, or what is signified. Paedobaptists teach that the

grace signified by baptism belongs only to those who believe. Paedobaptists are credobaptists in this sense.

I agree that “the grace signified by baptism belongs only to those who believe” and that “Paedobaptists are credobaptists in this sense.” I would also concede that John does not directly refer to water baptism (which would be a bit premature at this stage in his Gospel presentation). Nevertheless, I’m inclined to think, in light of my exposition above, that *this passage does carry implications regarding the recipients of baptism and membership in New Covenant churches.*

Under both the Abrahamic and Mosaic administrations, the “way of salvation” (*ordo salutis*) was preached primarily through shadows and was not, as a whole, realized in the “people of God.” Under the New Covenant, however, God’s redemptive program has advanced. Now the history of redemption (*historia salutis*) and way of salvation (*ordo salutis*) will more closely coincide. (Note: perfect coincidence will await the eschaton.) To achieve this result, God demands faith in Messiah as *the warrant* for inclusion within the New Covenant community. Natural descent and outward circumcision served their typical purposes under the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. But blood-ties to Abraham and removed foreskins failed to effect the kind of changes in the covenant community God ultimately desired. Therefore,

Finding fault *with His people*, He says: “Look, the days are coming,” says the Lord, “when I will make a *new covenant* with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day I took them by their hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. Because they did not continue in My covenant, I disregarded them,” says the Lord. “But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” says the Lord: “*I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they will be My people.* And each person will not teach his fellow citizen, and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ *because they will all know Me*, from the least to the greatest of them. *For I will be merciful to their wrongdoing, and I will never again remember their sins.*” By saying, a new covenant, He has declared that the first is old. And what is old and aging *is about to disappear* [emphasis added] (Hebrews 8:8–13, HCSB).

In keeping with the redemptive-historical shift portended by the prophet Jeremiah, highlighted by the author of Hebrews, and reinforced by the teaching of John 1:12–13, I would argue that those who have divinely conferred legal warrant to enter into God’s newly constituted covenant family are those who give evidence of the new birth though a credible profession of faith in Jesus the Messiah. The fact that unregenerate men and women are sometimes baptized and brought into

the New Covenant community on profession of faith that later turns out to be false does not contradict or invalidate the Credobaptist argument. Even the Paedobaptist predicates adult baptism on a credible profession of faith.

Hence, “the proverbial elephant sitting in the Credo-Baptist living room,” as one Paedobaptist brother put it, is in his living room too. The question is one of *divinely bestowed legal warrant* (John 1:12). What the Credobaptist avers is that this demand for a credible profession of faith as the warrant for inclusion within God’s New Covenant family is not a substantial continuation of the state of affairs under the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants with, of course, a few minor changes, like the switch from circumcision to baptism and from the Passover to the Lord’s Supper. It is, rather, a new state of affairs from a redemptive-historical standpoint. Hence, the church and her leadership are no longer warranted by God to include physical seed in the covenant by virtue of mere blood-ties to believing parents. To those who receive Christ and to those alone does God grant *de jure* the privilege of New Covenant member status.

In closing, I acknowledge that some of my Paedobaptist brothers may affirm most of what I have said and acknowledge its validity as *a general rule*. They will, however, quickly remind me of a handful of New Testament passages that, in their minds, provide biblical warrant for *an exception to the rule*. They will point to Jesus’ receptive disposition toward children (Acts 18:1–10; Mark 10:14–16), Acts 2:38–39; household baptisms (Acts 16:15; 31–34; 18:8; 1 Corinthians 1:16), and the children made “holy” text (1 Corinthians 7:14). But these passages are hardly conclusive and undisputed. It should also be noted in that in all the New Testament polemic against the Judaizers’ attempt to foist the continuing demand of outward circumcision upon the New Covenant community never once do the apostles settle the confusion with the simple observation that circumcision has been superseded by baptism. Colossians 2:11–12 does not replace outward circumcision with water baptism. Rather, it replaces outward circumcision with inward circumcision (Philippians 3:3), i.e., regeneration, which in turn is evidence by faith (John 1:12–13) and symbolized in water baptism (Colossians 2:12). So, with all due respect and appreciation for my Paedobaptist brothers, I do not believe that the Credobaptists argues in a “void.”

Well, this is one reason why I’m still a Baptist. There are others too. But I still love and respect my dear friends and esteemed heroes in the faith who see things differently. In essentials unity. In non-essentials liberty. In all things charity. ☺

Notes:

¹ William Hendricksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1953), 1:81.

² Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 98.

³ Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1962), 265.

⁴ See *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 4:16–19.

⁵ John Murray, *Collected Works* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 2:226.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:228–229.

⁷ Robert Peterson, *Adopted by God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2001), 105.

⁸ See also J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1957), 3:16–17.

⁹ *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, 4:16–17.

¹⁰ Ryle, *Expository Thoughts*, 3:22.

Timothy George and *Reading Scripture with the Reformers*

An Interview

Wyman Richardson

Your book, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers*, is the companion volume for the *Reformation Commentary on Scripture* series (InterVarsity Press). Before we talk about the book, I'd like to ask about this larger project, for which you serve as General Editor. Can you speak a bit about the genesis of this series and how you came to be involved in it?

Several years ago InterVarsity Press began a series called the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. The General Editor was Tom Oden. It was a collection of volumes looking at the early church Fathers and their view and exegesis of Scripture. Well, that series is now completed and there was a view both at InterVarsity Press and in some of the interviews that were done in response to that series that it would be great if we had something similar to this on the period of the Reformation. So the *Reformation Commentary on Scripture* (RCS), is really a sequel series to the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*.

We think it is important that we not leapfrog over the Reformation in going back to the early church, especially those of us who stand in the Protestant and Evangelical tradition. We have to come to grips with the Reformers.

So this, in a way, is a project that is intended to make the exegetical writings of the 16th century Reformation accessible and available to pastors and teachers of the church today.

You have written widely on Reformation issues through the years, most notably in your *Theology of the Reformers*. I'm curious to know if you would object to this project being called your *magnum opus*? I ask because this would seem to be a career-defining project and the culmination of a great deal of work spanning a number of years in which you have been exploring Reformation theology.

I think that's for other people to say and not myself. I consider it a very important and, obviously, long enduring work. We hope to bring out, say, three volumes a year, beginning this year—2011—with our very first volume and then bringing out two or three volumes a year up to the completion of the project, twenty eight volumes. So it will take a big chunk of my life if God gives me that much longer to live.

It is in some ways, I would say, the culmination of a lot of thought and the investment of a lot of scholarship and work I've done on the Reformation over the years. More importantly, I think it's of real service to the church and, in that way, for ministry.

Reading Scripture with the Reformers is a carefully reasoned and compellingly argued plea for modern interpreters of Scripture to consider the wisdom of exploring and excavating the vast exegetical and hermeneutical mines of the Reformation. Is it reasonable to expect busy men and women to become acquainted with Reformation exegesis? Is this project an effort to make these treasures more accessible to modern people?

Yes, it is reasonable to expect that busy men and women become acquainted with Reformation exegesis. That is, if those particular people have been called and charged by the church of Jesus Christ to be teachers and proclaimers of the Word. Paul says, "We don't preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord." That kind of mandate requires nothing less than the very best preparation, the deepest kind of serious study possible.

J.I. Packer, my good friend and mentor in so many ways, has quipped that "American Evangelicalism is three thousand miles wide and one inch deep." Well, I'm not saying that's always true because there are exceptions to that, but I think this project is intended to enrich the preaching and teaching ministries of the churches today. And I would say if you're not willing to invest significant time and energy and thought and preparation in your sermons, including digging into the exegetical wisdom of the church in ages

past, then you probably shouldn't be in the business of proclaiming and teaching the Word of God. Go sell car insurance! Do something more profitable than preaching. So I don't have a lot of patience with, "I'm too busy. I don't have time for that." Then choose another line of work. That's what I would say to people like that.

However, we should not expect every working pastor to be a research scholar in the early church and the Reformation. That would be an unreasonable expectation. So, in fact, this commentary is intended to take some of the exegetical treasury of the Reformation and make it accessible, available to hard working, busy pastors and church leaders and teachers today. That's exactly what we're trying to do.

You note that "it is ironic that the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*, though much misunderstood, has led to the neglect among Protestants of the biblical commentaries of the reformers" (p.22). This is indeed ironic. Are you suggesting that the principle of *sola scriptura*, when perverted, tends to exalt individuals' confidence in their own isolated interpretations to the point that they no longer feel the need for the voices of the past? If so, does *sola scriptura* have a tendency to cut its own throat?

Yes, and that's because *sola scriptura* is frequently misunderstood and degraded into what I've called before *nuda scriptura*. James Leo Garrett, a great teacher and scholar long associated with Southwestern Seminary, has talked about *sola scriptura* as *scriptura suprema*. What that means is that the Bible, the written Word of God, is the touchstone by which everything else—all the creeds, councils and theologies of the ages—have to be tested. It doesn't mean that we are at liberty just to ignore everything that has been said and done. In fact, that is a sign of arrogance, of incredible hubris, to think that you can come to the Scriptures in total isolation from what God has been saying to the church through the ages.

So I do think *sola scriptura* can be and has been misinterpreted and misunderstood. We still have to hold on to that principle, however, because God has revealed Himself to us uniquely and authoritatively and normatively in His written Word. That is the touchstone of Reformation exegesis.

Gutenberg's invention stands at the center of the Reformation. Was the Reformation to some extent a technological revolution?

Yes, a *typographical* revolution we might say. It was, in fact, Gutenberg's amazing ditto device, the printing press, that enabled the Scriptures to be so widely disseminated. Prior to the invention of the printing press, it took

upwards of one year for a complete copy of the Bible to be made by a scribe in a scriptorium working by hand: line by line, letter by letter, page by page. Now, almost overnight, that changes with Gutenberg. So it clearly affected the whole way in which communication took place, in which education was done and the dissemination of the Scriptures.

Once the Bible began to be translated it was possible for many, many people to have copies—their own copies—of the Bible. That would have been unheard of prior to Gutenberg. There were very few Bibles, complete Bibles, anywhere, except maybe in some of the universities and cathedrals. Often they were chained, not to keep people from reading them but so they wouldn't be stolen, the way we used to chain telephone directories in phone booths. You're probably too young to remember that, Wyman. There used to be such a thing as a phone booth and there was a phone book in it that was actually chained so that people would not walk away with it. That's the same thing with the Bible prior to the invention of the printing press. You don't want to say that there would have been no Reformation without Gutenberg, but you do have to say that the Reformation would not have taken off and had such a profound and widespread effect without this typographical revolution.

I was struck by the eerie similarity between Noel Beda's arguments for the Vulgate (p.73) and arguments you sometimes encounter in certain extreme manifestations of the "KJV-only" movement today. Is it fair to say that every age has people arguing for one perfect, static translation?

Yes. One of the foundational charter principles of Christianity and of the Bible is its translatability. Christians believe the Bible can be translated into any language human beings can speak. That's different from Islam. Muslims believe that the Qu'ran was revealed to Muhammad in Arabic and only in Arabic is it the authoritative, inspired word of God according to Muslims.

Christians don't accept that principle. The Bible was written in Greek and Hebrew and a little Aramaic, but from the beginning we see the Bible being translated into the various languages of the Roman Empire. Later there was the Vulgate, the official Latin translation of the Bible made by St. Jerome in the early church. One thing you have to say for the Vulgate: it had the longest run of any one, single translation, over a thousand years in the Christian West. The Vulgate was really the one and only normative text of the Bible. So when the Reformation came along at the time of the Renaissance, you had the recovery of classical antiquity, you had new manuscripts being found, you had Erasmus' critical edition of the Greek New Testament in 1516. There was a resistance against translating the Scriptures into any of the vernacular languages.

Why? Well, part of it was because people were afraid of the Bible. If you let the Bible loose there's no telling what might happen. There was a genuine fear that there would be a kind of revolutionary, rabble-rousing, even violent response if you gave people the Scriptures to read in their own tongue. But, when we look back on it now, we can see that God was indeed at work in the whole process of the Reformation: the printing press, the recovery of classical antiquity, the translation of the Bible (Luther translated it into German, William Tyndale into English and others in all of the vernaculars of Europe). This really was one of the lasting legacies of the Reformation.

I could not help but think, while reading the book, of some of the current debates surrounding the idea of biblicism. I'm thinking, for example, of the debate between Robert Gundry and Christian Smith in the last couple of issues of *Books and Culture* on the issue of biblicism. I'm curious to know if you see the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura* as being roughly synonymous with the idea of biblicism. Would Luther have considered himself a biblicist in the same way that, say, a Baptist today might employ the term?

It's a slippery term, biblicism. It's like all these terms we use: fundamentalism, I can think of a hundred others. What do these words mean? If by biblicist you mean a person who takes their anchorage in the written Word of God, that Scripture is the *norma normans*, the norm by which all other norms must be normed, that, as we Baptists like to say, the Bible is our only rule for faith and practice—if that's what you mean by biblicism then, yes, Luther was one and I think we ought to be exactly the same.

However, I think that biblicism is sometimes meant in a much more narrow sense than that. Biblicism, for some people, means you don't approach the Bible with all of the scholarly tools available, that you simply read it in a vacuum, as it were, ahistorically. If something like that is what is meant by biblicism then it is a perversion of the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*.

Do you want to follow up on that? I'm not sure exactly how biblicism is functioning in that question.

Well, I think you've answered the question well. Biblicism, as I hear it referred to, often refers to the idea of an eisegetical imposition of a system, that our systems somehow taint our reading of Scripture.

Well here's the thing: when you open your Bible you bring something with you. We should not imagine that we are sitting or standing on a kind of independent epistemological platform in which everything can be judged in a kind of omniscient objectivity. No, we bring to the reading of the text the

things that have shaped us, whether that's the modern worldview, whether that's some prejudice we've picked up in Sunday School when we were kids, whatever that is. We bring that to the text and we only deceive ourselves if we think we are exempt from that.

Now, one of the reasons why reading Scripture with the Reformers is so important is that it allows us to check our own prejudices against the reading and exegesis of other godly men of the past. That doesn't mean their interpretation is always right. They were certainly not infallible. They could be dead wrong. But it's always good to have several voices in this conversation. That's why we need to read the Reformers and see how this text struck them, what they made of it, and then bring that back into our own context with our own prejudices and presuppositions. I think that's a better way forward in Bible study.

You draw attention to some lesser known Reformation figures like Matthias and Katarina Zell. Did you make an intentional effort to introduce the reader to lesser known figures like these? Do you think there are a number of important figures that have been overshadowed by the major lights of the Reformation?

Yes. One of my great Reformation teachers was Dr. David Steinmetz who's been at Duke for many years. He was a visiting professor at Harvard when I was there and I was privileged to study with him for one year. He wrote a book entitled *Reformers in the Wings* some years ago. There are many, you might say, minor characters in the Reformation. At least they're on the sidelines. They're not in the spotlight like Luther and Calvin and Cranmer and the great ones that we always think about. But they made a profound contribution to the Reformation and to the recovery of the Bible in the Reformation.

So in this project, the *Reformation Commentary on Scripture*, we are intentionally drawing on the breadth of Reformation exegesis. It's not just going to be twenty-eight volumes of Luther and Calvin. You'll find a lot of Luther and Calvin in every volume, I assure you, because they're such massively important figures and had so much to say about the Bible. But we also have a lot of the other lesser luminaries, including the two you mentioned, Matthias and Katarina Zell.

Matthias Zell was a Dominican friar. He embraced the Reformation and became the first preacher of the Protestant Reformation in the city of Strasbourg. Katarina Zell, his wife, was an amazing woman herself. She wrote a number of treatises and also hymns. She conducted funeral services for the Anabaptists. She was an incredible person. So these were figures who played a very decisive role in the going forward, the progress of the Reformation in

the 16th century and sometimes even contributing to our understanding of the text itself through their commentaries and treatises. So, yes, we're trying to bring these people in from the shadows, so to speak, and give them a little bit of limelight because they're part of the story.

You refer to the “Word in Scripture” and the “living Word Jesus Christ” as “the two poles of Reformation theology” (p.258). Do you believe that the Reformation reclamation of Scripture successfully freed the gospel for a fresh hearing, or is that an oversimplification?

I actually like the way you put that: the Reformation reclamation of Scripture. We have to keep in mind that the Reformers were not about starting anything new. They were about reclaiming, retrieving something they felt had become obscured in the course of the medieval period. So they wanted to go back to the New Testament, back to the early church Fathers, and scrub off all of the barnacles that had attached to the good ship church during that period of time. It wasn't just repristinization for the sake of being old fashioned. It was rather that they wanted to carry on this project of reclamation so that the gospel could shine forth more clearly. That's what was at stake. And though we live in a very different context, that's also what's at stake today.

So I'd like to join that project. I'd like for other churches today to read the Reformers, not because they have the final word on everything but because their intention was to return to the Scriptures, to return to the gospel and, above all, to return to Jesus Christ, as you say to free the gospel for a fresh hearing.

Thank you, Dr. George, for this very helpful book and for your work on the *Reformation Commentary on Scripture* project. 🐦

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