

A Response to “Radical Calvinism!”

By Pastor Jeff Alexander

Note: Before you read this article, you may want to read Sumner’s critical review, [“Radical Calvinism!”](#) first.

The November/December 2000 issue of *The Biblical Evangelist* (Vol. 31, Number 6), the periodical of Evangelist Robert L. Sumner) contains a “review” of my book, *Predestined for Heaven? Yes!* Sadly, the rather lengthy article does not review the book but is, instead, a reaction to what is perceived as a vicious attack on the authors of the anti-Calvinistic works cited in my book.¹

Obviously, the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation) held by author Robert Sumner² is very different from that addressed in my book. He and his friends all wrote and published their anti-Calvinistic works long before my book. By publishing, they placed their views as Bible truth before public scrutiny. In fact, their stated purpose in publishing was to correct the unbiblical errors of Calvinism. Sumner’s long-time friend, now deceased, John R. Rice, wrote his book *Predestined for Hell? No!* to explain “God’s foreknowledge, predestination, and election *from the Scriptures, correcting the errors of hyper-Calvinism* . . .”³ Robert L. Sumner, in his *An Examination of TULIP*, asked, “Is this teaching [the ‘five points’ of Calvinism] totally Scriptural? Is it totally unscriptural? Is it part true and part false?”⁴ It becomes soon evident that Sumner also aims to correct from the Scriptures the errors of five-point Calvinism.

I wrote my book because I found that these authors, among others, distorted Calvinism and then sought to refute this distortion. I sought to rectify their errors, not slander their persons. In my introduction I specifically cautioned that “in citing names, we are not contending with the persons but with their [anti-Calvinistic] opinions.”⁵

The issue here is not personalities but truth. What do the Scriptures teach concerning God’s foreknowledge, predestination, and election? All anti-Calvinistic books and articles I have personally studied failed in their purpose because of three tendencies: (1) They show little or no serious exegesis of the Biblical texts involved. Instead, the authors load biblical terms with their own definitions and interpret verses to reflect their own theology. (2) They persistently and consistently misrepresent the doctrines of Calvinism. (3) In blatant self-denial, they adamantly refuse to admit that their theology is actually four-point Arminianism. As a rebuttal of Sumner’s “review,” I shall address these issues.

Little or No Serious Bible Exegesis

First, anti-Calvinists purport to refute “hyper”-Calvinism (their terminology for five point Calvinism) with *biblical* evidence. I had hoped Sumner’s review would show how Calvinists mishandle the Word of God. He claims that he could answer me Scripturally, but he does not. Since he does not, I cannot rebut him from the “review.” Thus, I must rely upon his essay on TULIP, where he does make an effort to explain away certain passages used by Calvinists (e.g., Romans 9:10-13; John 15:15, 16; 2 Timothy 2:9, 10; 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14; Romans 8:28-31).

Sumner’s Treatment of 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14

Second Thessalonians 2:13, 14 is, according to Sumner, “a favorite passage of the five-point Calvinist”⁶ and one that I used in my book. Sumner argues that this passage does *not* teach *unconditional* election. He admits that, taken by themselves, the words, “*God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation,*” do seem to teach that doctrine. However, he says that to take these words alone without the words that follow makes the interpreter “dishonest”—like those who teach baptismal regeneration from 1 Peter 3:21.⁷ He claims that the “supposed” unconditional election teaching evaporates in the next words, “*through sanctification and a belief of the truth.*” How is this so? It is obvious to Sumner: one cannot “believe before the foundation of the world.” True, but it is the *choosing*, not the *believing*, that takes place in eternity past. “*Sanctification of the Spirit and a belief in the truth*” refers to salvation, not to God’s choosing. Salvation is experienced in time. Sanctification and faith are the *means* whereby the chosen Thessalonians experienced their salvation. These words evaporate nothing by themselves.

Actually, instead of exegeting the passage, Sumner eisegetes (reads his interpretation into) the passage. First, he imports his view of divine foreknowledge into the argument, even though foreknowledge is not mentioned in the text. This he does by referring to 1 Peter 1:2. No one disagrees that the elect are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God. The question is, how do Peter and Paul understand foreknowledge?

Sumner’s View of Foreknowledge

I searched his booklet in vain for Sumner’s definition of *foreknowledge*. It is obvious that he assumes his readers know what he means by the term. A clear definition is very important because it is this *foreknowledge* of God that is supposed to make unconditional election evaporate from the text. Indeed, Sumner writes, “The Bible kind of election starts with foreknowledge, and any teaching of election today not starting in the same place will be fraught with confusion, misunderstanding and outright heresy.”⁸

The nearest thing to a definition of Sumner's foreknowledge is found in this statement: "For a biblical illustration of the fact that foreknowledge is not predetermination, consider Peter's words: '... SEEING YE KNOW THESE THINGS BEFORE ...' (2 Peter 3:17)."⁹ In other words, Sumner believes that God merely foresees but does not foreordain that the Thessalonians will believe. This is further evidenced in these statements: "Perhaps the problem is that the five-point Calvinist confuses foreknowledge with predestination."¹⁰ And, "It is not, as some would have us think, 'foreknowledge according to election,' but 'election according to foreknowledge.'"¹¹

Sumner has committed two errors. First, he assumes his understanding of *foreknowledge* is the correct one in the text.¹² He makes no effort to prove that Peter's use of *foreknowledge* means that God only "sees" but does not foreordain the faith of his readers. Authors generally make it clear how they use a term. In 1 Peter 1:20 the verb *proginosko* (the noun form is *proginosis* [*foreknowledge*] in 1:2) is translated "*foreordained*" ("*who* [Christ] *verily was foreordained*"). Did God merely foresee that Jesus would die on the cross and then elect Him to die? Was Peter just confusing foreknowledge with foreordination, or did he mean the same thing, using the same word in both places?

Peter's "elect" brethren indeed owe their salvation to God's predetermination in their election (v. 2),¹³ just as it was God's predetermination that Jesus would die for them on the cross (v. 20). Paul declares that the Thessalonians believed unto salvation because God chose them to it, not because He foresaw their faith (2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14).

Sumner's view of election is wrong because of other considerations as well. He assumes the Thessalonians could exercise the faith that God is supposed to foresee. For Sumner's view of foreknowledge to work, the "natural man" must be able to respond to God in spiritual matters contrary to 1 Corinthians 2:14. Contrary to Sumner, Paul, in 2 Thessalonians 2:10, was showing the new Thessalonian saints how God's choice of them to salvation delivered them from the judgment God was bringing upon the world. They had been rescued from perishing, unlike those who "*believed not the truth*" (v. 12). They escaped the strong delusion God was going to send to others (v. 11). Their salvation from these things was not owing to *something* in them that was not in others—that somehow they were wiser or more alert to the truth. In fact, they had already been deceived (v. 2). In spite of their weakness, they owed their salvation to God's gracious and unconditional election of them.¹⁴

Sumner's second error—fleeing to "third-party" texts¹⁵ to prove a point—is quite common to his crowd. Sumner does this, as we have seen above, with 1 Peter 1:2 and 2 Peter 3:17 to argue Paul's meaning in 2 Thessalonians. Now, it is all right to *support* the proven conclusion of a text by proper exegesis, but third-party texts do not necessarily prove what the author means in a disputed text. The problem with this method is that it uses the fallacy of the "mere sound of words." Two authors may have entirely different purposes in the use of the same terms as do Paul and James on justification by faith and works. Only the careful exegesis of the passage will demonstrate the author's intended meaning of words.

In my book I addressed the view of God's foreknowledge as merely foreseeing faith,¹⁶ which the "review" ignores. What does Sumner's view of foreknowledge do to God? (1) It makes Him look foolish by doing the unnecessary. If God foresees the sinner's already believing in Christ for salvation, then why is God choosing him to salvation? This choosing is a redundant act. (2) It puts God in the position of a passive observer, not an active Savior. It is the sinner's act of believing that becomes the determining factor in salvation, not God's will.

What does Sumner's view do to free will? If God foresees the sinner's faith before the foundation of the world, then that knowledge must be certain and unchangeable. The free choice, which Sumner hoped to preserve for the sinner by evaporating unconditional election just *evaporated* too. The only suitable alternative to Calvinism is that God neither *knows* nor *determines* the free choices of his creatures.

The Real Issue Involved

Viewing unconditional election as unfair, anti-Calvinists must interpret election passages in a way that establishes God's fairness to all sinners, preserving the ability of the natural man to choose for himself in spiritual matters. This they state clearly in their writings. I cite Baptist theologian H. C. Theissen, who argued that his view of election (as opposed to unconditional election) answers the "persistent demand of the *heart* for a theory of election that does commend itself to *our* sense of justice."¹⁷ Theissen further stated, "In the minds of some people, election is a choice that God makes for which *we can see no reason* and which we can hardly harmonize with His justice."¹⁸ What Theissen found objectionable with the doctrine of unconditional election was not that it was unscriptural but that it was, in his mind, not fair to sinners.

John R. Rice expressed a similar objection:

How could I feel toward God, if I should find out that when He said, "whosoever will" He did not mean that, because He had made men so that many of them could not repent if they would? How would I feel toward the Saviour if I found that, though He professed to die for the sins of the whole world, He had already consigned some people to Hell with no chance to repent, no matter how much they wished to do so?¹⁹

It does not matter how we feel or whether we can see a reason for God's will. If God's Word teaches unconditional election, then we must accept it. It is this outrage over the seeming unfairness of God that Sumner reveals in his "review": "[N]o matter how you slice it, *the bottom line of his [Calvinistic] theology is that sinners go to Hell because God refuses to elect them to Heaven!*"²⁰ What a distortion of my belief in a righteous God who can do no wrong!

Calvinism Misrepresented

Hyper-Calvinism

The anti-Calvinists fail in their purpose not only because they do little serious Bible exegesis but also because they persistently misrepresent the Calvinistic position they hope to refute. They distort the position and then fight their distortion. This is evidenced in the subtitle of Sumner's article in the *Biblical Evangelist*: "A Review of a Bad Book that Carries Calvinism to Its 'Hyper' Extreme." In the article he states concerning me, "When he gets through changing definitions to fit his theology, you may not recognize what he is saying." Well, I will turn that statement back on Mr. Sumner. He seems to love to do battle against giant "Calvinist" with weapons of words like "extreme" and "hyper." No matter how much one may protest or show what real hyper-Calvinism is, he will not be corrected. I am not a hyper-Calvinist. It does not bother me that Sumner disagrees with my ancient and venerable theology, but it is disconcerting that he refuses to represent it accurately. For this reason, much of the "review" is confusing and hard to follow. When he cites me, he imposes his own conceptions on my words. How can there be any legitimate discussion?

Sumner's failure to understand real hyper-Calvinism is evident in his quoting Spurgeon's sermon "Warrant of Faith"²¹ under his heading, "*Regeneration Before Conversion?*" Note that Spurgeon's sermon is about whether the sinner must have a *warrant* (a claim within himself) for believing on Christ. It is about preaching the gospel to sinners as sinners and not about what comes first—regeneration or faith. Sumner uses this sermon to argue that Spurgeon did not hold the Calvinistic position that regeneration must precede faith. It proves nothing of the kind. However, his use of this sermon does reveal that Sumner does not know what hyper-Calvinism is.

Hyper-Calvinists teach that the gospel should not be preached to any but those who evidence the marks of regeneration—a sensibility to the gospel, a conviction of sin, or an interest in the Savior. Some hyper-Calvinists teach that the gospel can be preached only to "sensible sinners." These, Spurgeon warned, "serve out deadly potions to the people, often containing but one ounce of gospel to a pound of law."²²

These excellent men [hyper-Calvinists] had a fear of preaching the gospel to any except those whom they styled "sensible sinners," and consequently kept hundreds of their hearers sitting in darkness when they might have rejoiced in the light. They preached repentance and hatred of sin as the warrant of a sinner's trusting to Christ. According to them, a sinner might reason thus—"I possess such-and-such a degree of sensibility on account of sin, therefore I have a right to trust in Christ."²³

Again, from the same sermon: "I would proclaim it with my last breath, crying aloud, that 'Jesus came into the world to save *sinners*'—sinners as sinners, not as penitent sinners or as awakened sinners, but sinners as sinners, sinners 'of whom I am chief.'"²⁴

Regeneration before Conversion?

It is in this context that we find Sumner's quote from Spurgeon: "In our own day certain preachers assure us that a man must be regenerated before we may *bid* him believe in Jesus Christ; some degree of a work of grace in the heart being, in their judgment, the only *warrant* to believe."²⁵ Sumner regards "the fact that one must be born again, regenerated . . ." before one can believe as "so inane, I have no idea where it originated."²⁶ Sumner argues that dead sinners have it in their ability to accept or reject Christ of their own free will. In his opinion, sinners must believe in order to be regenerated. He wants an "honest Calvinist like Charles Haddon Spurgeon" to support his view. He should have read "Regeneration and Faith," where Spurgeon said,

At the same time, this faith, wherever it exists, is in every case, without exception, the gift of God and the work of the Holy Spirit. Never yet did a man believe in Jesus with the faith here intended, except the Holy Spirit led him to do so. He has wrought all our works in us, and our faith too. Faith is too celestial a grace to spring up in human nature *till it is renewed*: faith is in every believer "the gift of God."²⁷

This statement sure sounds as if "the great Charlie" believed that saving faith is the gift of God in a renewed (regenerated) nature. Indeed, even the sermon "Warrant of Faith" argues against Sumner's view that sinners have within them the ability to believe in order to be regenerated:

For if my warrant to trust in Jesus be found in my experience, my loathings of sin, or my longings after Christ, then all these good things of mine are a legitimate ground of boasting, because though Christ may save me, yet these were the wedding-dress which fitted me to come to Christ. *If these be indispensable pre-requisites and conditions,*

then the man who has them may truly and justly say, “Christ did save me, but I had the pre-requisites and conditions first, and therefore let these share the praise.”²⁸

Again, “It is *false*, my brethren, it is as false as God is true, that *anything in a sinner* can be his warrant for believing in Jesus.”²⁹

Is a Preference of Terms Changing Definitions?

The “review” faulted me for preferring “*particular redemption*” to “*limited atonement*” and “*effectual calling*” to “*irresistible grace*.” The reviewer sees my motive for these preferences as an effort to cover the fact that my form of Calvinism blames God for the damnation of sinners. This is not so. My desire is to clarify terms in order to avoid confusion in discussion.

For example, Sumner calls “*limited*” atonement a “harsh and ugly thought.”³⁰ But the fact is, unless one is a universalist (believing all men will be saved; Sumner is *not* a universalist), all evangelicals hold to some form of *limited* atonement. If the atonement is not limited in the intention of God, then it is limited by the free choice of sinners. No matter *how* it is limited, it is still *limited*. Therefore, a better Calvinistic expression is *particular redemption*. Calvinists believe that Christ’s death infallibly accomplished the purpose of God in saving a great host of sinners. It was a “particular” redemption of particular individuals.

In *irresistible grace*, “*irresistible*” is misconstrued to mean that God coerces some sinners, perhaps kicking and screaming to salvation, against their wills. The non-elect, on the other hand, have no choice but to face God’s cold and heartless indifference. Many “poor” sinners may long to be saved, but, alas, if they are not elect, “God will not permit”³¹ their salvation. Now, the issue here is, again, the matter of fairness and free will—that sinners must have free choice in their own salvation. Apparently, Calvinists, according to Sumner, cannot believe both in the responsibility of sinners and in unconditional election at the same time.

Calvinists, along with anti-Calvinists, teach that all who willingly come to Christ will be saved and all who willfully refuse to repent and believe the gospel will be damned. The difference in positions is that Calvinists understand the Bible to teach that the “*natural man*” neither understands nor inclines himself to spiritual things (1 Corinthians 2:14; Romans 3:11). Sinners will always refuse Christ until the Holy Spirit graciously works in their hearts to grant them faith and repentance (John 5:40; 6:44, 65). When God’s Spirit brings them to Christ, they come willingly (Psalm 110:3). This is what Calvinists refer to as “*effectual calling*.” All whom the Spirit draws to Christ are saved. Of course, Sumner believes that it takes a work of the Spirit to bring sinners to Christ, but he also believes that any sinner so drawn may resist that work and refuse Christ.³²

“Whosoever Will” and “Free Willers”

Sumner would prefer the term “*whosoever-will*” theology to “*free-will*” theology. He charges that “*free will*” “is a term used by ‘sovereign grace’ people as slander and contempt, while [*whosoever will*] is a biblical term.”³³ I have found that “*free will*” is a term cherished by many Christians. When I declare that it is God who saves, the retort is, “But we have a free will!” or, “The Bible says, ‘Whosoever will.’” However, let us look at the biblical term “*whosoever*.”

“*Whosoever*” is understood by many to be an indefinite offer—“anyone can.” For example, in John 3:16 “*whosoever believeth*,” is understood to mean that because God loves every sinner and gave His Son to die for them, God offers eternal life to anyone who wants to be saved. It says nothing of the kind. The Greek translated “*whosoever believeth . . .*” literally reads, “*that the ones believing* might not perish, but have everlasting life.” In other words, this verse is not an offer at all but a declaration that *believers* will not perish.³⁴

The Greek term most often translated “*whosoever*” is *pas*. It has several uses, such as the distributive “each”; or the summarizing “every kind of,” “all manner of,” or “all sort of”; and the indefinite pronoun “every” or “all.”³⁵ The term designates the class of people to whom a promise is restricted. For example, John 11:26 states, “*And whosoever [pas] liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?*” Again, this is not an indefinite offer. It declares that there is a class of people who *live* and *believe* (what they believe is that Jesus is the resurrection and the life, v. 25), and they and they *only* will never die.³⁶

The *only* verse where “*whosoever will*” is found in invitational form is Revelation 22:17: “*And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will* [the Greek, *thelo*, “the one desiring”], *let him take the water of life freely.*” Only those who are thirsty and who desire the water are invited to come. Only those in whom God creates that desire will come.

Calvinists use this biblical terminology as well as the non-Calvinists (and I refrain from calling them “free-willers” so as not to offend). The problem, however, remains: how is the term to be defined in its use? What did the authors of the Scriptures have in mind when they penned “*whosoever*”—“*whosoever can*” or “*whosoever will*”?

Blatant Self-Denial

Biblicism

Anti-Calvinists simply refuse to admit that they are actually four-point Arminians. They do not want to own the label *Arminian*, but they repudiate all points of Calvinism except eternal security. Sumner prefers the label “*Biblicist*.”³⁷ However, both Calvinists and Arminians would claim to be *Biblicists*.

I addressed the “*Biblicist*” issue in my book on pages 26-28. Apparently, Sumner missed the purpose of my chart and the third line with the question mark. If “*Biblicism*” is a legitimate third position that is neither Calvinistic nor Arminian, it should be clearly evident. I asked six questions relating to the points of controversy between Calvinism and Arminianism. I stated the position of each on the question and then asked how “*Biblicism*” would answer differently. Sumner states, “Incidentally, I could answer every one of his question marks in a scriptural manner.” I would like to see his answers, even though he claims I am not looking for them. But then I already know his answers because he has stated them in his “review” and in his essay on TULIP. So, I will now demonstrate that I know what his brand of “*Biblicism*” says.³⁸

The first question: “Can a sinner make a choice for salvation without first being regenerated?” As already noted, Sumner thinks the idea that “one must be born-again, regenerated . . . before he or she can put faith and trust in Christ for salvation . . . is so inane, [he has] no idea where it originated.”³⁹ Unless I am misreading him, Sumner repudiates the notion that regeneration must precede faith; thus, he believes that faith in Christ produces regeneration. But that is what Arminianism teaches. So how is Sumner’s “*Biblicism*” different from Arminianism on this question?

On the second question (“Is the sinner totally disabled by sin?”), Sumner agrees in principle with the Calvinist. The doctrine is rather plain in Scripture. He says rightly, “The Word of God teaches that . . . man is totally depraved and totally unable to help himself.”⁴⁰ However, most Arminians, like John Wesley, also believe in the total depravity of sinners. Their way to avoid the logical “next step”—that God must predestine sinners to salvation—is to find some way to restore the sinner’s spiritual ability without interfering with the sinner’s free will. Sumner’s “*Biblicist*” approach is that “our Lord draws every man sufficiently and enlightens every man as much as necessary for that individual to make a decision of his own free will.”⁴¹ Now the simple fact is, Sumner has the Lord removing “total” from every sinner’s depravity so that every sinner is able to make a decision of his own free will. *Total* depravity is now a moot issue. It no longer exists, for, in Sumner’s theology, the sinner is now *able* to help himself because he *can* believe on Christ. So, how does his “*Biblicism*” differ from Arminianism since, in both positions, sinners are helped just short of regeneration in order to allow them either to accept or to reject salvation of their own free wills?

The third question: “Has God chosen a people He intends to save?” Sumner does believe in a doctrine of election but definitely not the “unconditional” variety, which he likens to “a stuffed ballot box.”⁴² Dr. Sumner holds to an “election based upon foreknowledge [of the sinner’s free choice] rather than predetermination.”⁴³ Since Arminian election is also based on God’s merely foreseeing the sinner’s choice of Him, I do not see how Sumner’s “*Biblicist*” view differs from Arminianism on this question.

My fourth question: “Did Christ die for all of lost humanity?” Obviously, if Sumner thinks that limited atonement is “a harsh and ugly thought” and that all sinners deserve a fair shake, he is a universal redemptionist, believing that Christ died for everyone who has ever lived. He states, “Christ *did* give Himself a ransom for *all* on the cross!”⁴⁴ Arminians are also universal redemptionists; so Sumner’s “*Biblicism*” does not differ from Arminianism on this question either.

The fifth question I posed is “Can sinners resist God’s saving grace?” Again, in the “review” Sumner said that he repudiated both unconditional election and irresistible grace. Unless he knows something I have not yet studied, his “*Biblicism*” and Arminianism are in full agreement here as well.

The last question: “Can a believer lose his salvation?” Sumner’s answer? “This is truly in accord with scriptural teaching, although the terminology here is most unfortunate.”⁴⁵

So, on four points of Calvinism, Sumner consistently agrees with Arminianism. I can only conclude that his “*Biblicism*” is four-point Arminianism. Why would he not want to identify himself clearly as such?

God’s Sovereignty

In closing this rebuttal, I would like to address one additional point raised in Sumner’s “review.” In the preface of my book, I stated that the bottom line of the controversy between Calvinists and anti-Calvinists is this: “Which view focuses upon human ‘free will’ while limiting God’s will?” Sumner replies, “We *totally* repudiate the idea that the position of Rice, Fisk, Sumner, *et al*, limits God’s will in any sense of the word—or in any sense of the Word! And it is certainly wicked and sinful to make ‘whosoever will’ contradict ‘God’s will!’”⁴⁶

First, I never implied that “whosoever will” contradicts God’s will. Again, Sumner loads the terms with his definitions in order to make me say what I never said. It is this sort of thing that makes it frustrating to deal with men like Sumner.

I contend that, by its very nature, the “free-will” (I use “free will” here in order not to confuse it with the biblical “whosoever will”) approach does limit God’s will. The Arminian treatment of 2 Peter 3:9 proves my point. I wrote the following in my book, but I do not know if Sumner read it:

The other side of this question of ability is what supposed “free will” does to the sovereignty of God. Can human will frustrate the Divine will? Can anyone or anything make God do what He is unwilling to do? Of course, most people will immediately say no because they view God as sovereign and all-powerful. When it comes to the issue of salvation, however, many will insist that God wants all sinners to be saved but that sinners are free to choose or refuse salvation. This means that in the matter of salvation God can be made to do what He is unwilling to do—let unrepentant sinners perish. “Yes,” they consent, “the Lord is . . . not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).⁴⁷

If it is God’s will that no sinner perishes, then every sinner who says no to Jesus is limiting the will of God. According to Sumner, *et al*, God will have them all to be saved, but they will not. When God says that His word “shall not return unto [Him] void [empty], but it shall accomplish that which [He] pleases” (Isaiah 55:11), then, in Sumner’s theology, every sinner who shuts his ears to the Word has just made God a liar.

Even his long-time friend, John Rice, disagrees with Sumner’s contention that his view does not limit the will of God. Rice wrote, “Men do resist the will of God.”⁴⁸ In another place, he said, “The Bible says many wonderful things about God, but it never says that God is an absolute unlimited sovereign.”⁴⁹ In the context of this latter quote, Rice argued that it is immoral for God to impose His sovereignty—His will in salvation—on anyone. Thus, when God says, “I will do all my pleasure [will]” (Isaiah 46:10), He cannot mean it. God’s will is frustrated in Sumner’s theology, no matter how much he protests. Free will advocate Douglas Macintosh wrote this astonishing sentence: “In the spiritual realm God’s sovereignty is only a glorious possibility until made actual by man’s voluntary surrender to God’s will and rule.”⁵⁰ “Free-will” theology does limit God’s sovereign will.

In conclusion, I have no illusions that this rebuttal will persuade Sumner nor that, in fairness to his readers, he will publish it. I make this effort, however, to help believers who have been taught “free-will” theology to see the difference and understand the issues involved. Healthy discussion demands an effort to understand one’s opponent properly. I came from Sumner’s position. I used to believe what he believes; so I know what his position is. However, Sumner, along with all anti-Calvinists that I have ever known, simply refuse to understand the Calvinistic position and represent it accurately. Now why is that?

End Notes:

¹ Robert L. Sumner, “Radical Calvinism!” *The Biblical Evangelist*, V. 31, Number 6, November/December, 2000, p. 1.

² Although his name does not appear as the author of the article, I assume Dr. Sumner wrote the article because of his use of first person personal references to my book’s “attacking” him by name, his reference to correspondence that he had with me, and his personal references to quotes I made from his anti-Calvinistic booklet.

³ John R. Rice, *Predestined for Hell? No!* (Wheaton, Ill.: Sword of the Lord Foundation, 1958), cover. Emphasis mine.

⁴ Robert L. Sumner, *An Examination of TULIP* (Murfreesboro, Tenn.: Biblical Evangelism Press, 1972), p. 3. Sumner considers five-point Calvinism to be a “shocking, startling teaching!” (p. 3).

⁵ Jeffrey W. Alexander, *Predestined for Heaven? Yes!* (Lamar, Colo.: Cause of God and Truth Publications, 1999), p. 10.

⁶ Sumner, *An Examination of TULIP*, pp. 16, 17.

⁷ This not-so-subtle accusation of Calvinists as “dishonest” is not supported with any evidence that Calvinists ignore the words that follow. There is also the unsubstantiated accusation that Calvinists bend the Scripture to accommodate their pet doctrines, as do the baptismal regenerationists.

⁸ Again, notice the unsupported accusation that Calvinists are heretics because they do not accept his definition of fore-knowledge. It is Peter’s, not Sumner’s, understanding of the term that interests interpreters.

⁹ Sumner, *An Examination of TULIP*, p. 19. He cited the whole verse, while I here quote only the part he emphasized with capital letters. The phrase, “ye know these things before,” is the Greek word under consideration—*proginosko*, “to fore-know.”

¹⁰ *Ibid*. Calvinists do not confuse foreknowledge with predestination. *Foreknow* is used to express God’s *choosing* of those whom He predestines to salvation.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹² How one defines God's foreknowing is a distinguishing mark of whether one's theology is Calvinistic or Arminian. Calvinists define God's foreknowledge as active and determinative. God knows things because His has decreed them. Arminians define God's foreknowing as passive and informational. God knows what humans will do but does not determine those acts. There are only three texts in the Scripture where the verbal form of *foreknow* is used of God (Rom. 8:29; 11:2; 1 Pet. 1:20). Every occurrence has persons, not things, as the object. Also, in light of Old Testament passages (Deut. 7:6, 7; Jer. 1:5; Ex. 33:17; Amos 3:2; *et al*) the NT usage of God's foreknowing clearly refers to His actively choosing to enter into a close relationship with those persons indicated, not simply a passive knowledge of their persons or something about them.

¹³ First Peter 1: 9, 10 supports this conclusion.

¹⁴ Paul penned this letter because the church feared they had missed Christ's coming and were in the "day of the Lord." Paul tells them that the Day of the Lord has not yet come because the man of sin has not been revealed (2:3). But when he would be revealed, the man of sin would deceive those who had no love of the truth (2:10). He says that God Himself would send them strong delusion in order that they might be damned (2:11, 12). So, now, how would that information comfort these poor fearful saints? A letter supposedly from Paul (2:2) had *deceived* them. To comfort them, Paul assures them that their salvation was settled before the foundation of the world in the *election* of God, not in their faith.

¹⁵ By third-party texts, I mean texts by another author used by the interpreter to prove the meaning of the text in question.

¹⁶ Alexander, pp. 76, 77, 80-87, 169, 170.

¹⁷ Henry C. Theissen, *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1949), p. 344, emphasis mine. I discuss Theissen's view of election in *Predestined for Heaven? Yes!*, pp. 73ff.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 345, emphasis mine.

¹⁹ Rice, p. 58, emphasis mine. Note Rice's assumption that some sinners could repent "if they would." Calvinists teach that no one will repent without God's graciously granting them the power to do so (Acts 11:18). No one goes to hell unrepentant, "no matter how much [he] might wish to do so."

²⁰ The bottom line of my theology is that the Bible teaches unconditional election of sinners to salvation (2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14). Free-will advocates will always object to God's sovereign right to do with them as He pleases. Romans 9 addresses this problem. Paul anticipates objections to God's sovereignty over Esau and Jacob: "*Is there unrighteousness with God?*" (Romans 9:14). One translation has it, "But that's not fair!" If God wills that some sinners not be elect, God is righteous in all He does. The clay has no authority to question the potter (Romans 9:21). The Potter's will is supreme. I would like to ask Sumner how he explains Romans 9:22, 23 in light of his conclusion that Romans 9 is not about salvation but service (*Examination of TULIP*, pp. 12, 13). As I pointed out in my book (p. 62), the subject of this passage is neither salvation nor service (although *salvation* is clearly in view, 9:1-3; 10:1) but God's sovereign right to do what He pleases.

²¹ Charles Spurgeon, "Warrant of Faith," (sermon #531, preached at Metropolitan Tabernacle, 1863).

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.* Observe that Spurgeon regarded these "hyper"-Calvinists as "excellent men."

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, emphasis mine.

²⁶ Sumner, "Radical Calvinism!" in the paragraph preceding the subhead, *Regeneration Before Conversion?* Calvinists do teach regeneration before conversion. But then, technically, so does Sumner. He believes that one must be born again before his life can change (convert) from a life of sin to a life of righteousness. However, what we are stressing is regeneration before saving faith. He does not know where the idea originated. I can help him here: it originated in the pages of God's revealed truth (John 1:12, 13).

²⁷ Charles Spurgeon, "Regeneration and Faith," (sermon #979, preached at Metropolitan Tabernacle, 1871), emphasis mine.

²⁸ Spurgeon, "Warrant of Faith," emphasis mine.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ “Radical Calvinism,” p. 6, under the heading “A New ‘Vocabulary.’”

³¹ A. C. Gaebelein, quoted in Sumner’s *An Examination of TULIP*, p. 7.

³² Sumner wrote, “The Word of God teaches that, while man is totally depraved and totally unable to help himself, our Lord draws *every man sufficiently* and enlightens every man *as much as necessary* for that individual to make a decision of his own free will” (*An Examination of TULIP*, p. 4, emphasis Sumner’s). To Sumner, the Spirit can do only so much to woo the sinner, and He can be frustrated with obstinate sinners.

³³ This statement was made in a letter to me dated December 1, 1999.

³⁴ See Alexander, pp. 137-149, for a more extensive treatment of John 3:16.

³⁵ Timothy and Barbara Friberg, *Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*, 1994, used in Bible Works, version 4, 1999, BibleWorks, LLC.

³⁶ It is interesting here to note the order: those who will never die are those who live, first, and believe, second. They are regenerated (made alive by resurrection power) first and then believe (saving faith).

³⁷ According to *Webster’s New World Dictionary*, a *Biblicist* is defined as (1) a person who takes the words of the Bible literally; (2) an expert on the Bible; (3) a specialist in Biblical literature.

³⁸ Please note that I am neither mocking nor avoiding disclosing what he really does believe, as he charges in the “review.”

³⁹ Sumner, “Radical Calvinism!” in the paragraph preceding the subhead, *Regeneration Before Conversion?*

⁴⁰ Sumner, *An Examination of TULIP*, p. 7.

⁴¹ Where is this doctrine taught in the Bible? Sumner uses John 1:9 about Christ’s lighting every man. He fails to demonstrate how this reference supports his interpretation of his doctrine. Clearly, multitudes of sinners living do not have that light and remain in darkness, but some have been delivered (Colossians 1:12-14) by the power of God. Christ is lighting only those who are delivered. John 3:19-21 explains why most remain in darkness. John 12:32 is often used to support Christ’s drawing every person, but again, how has Christ drawn every person to Him? The context is clear that He meant by “*lifting up*” the death He was to die on the cross (v. 33). Does the cross draw all men? Paul teaches that the cross is, to those who are perishing, foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:18). Those who find the cross foolishness are certainly not drawn by it. Now, if by “*all men*” (the Greek is *pantas*, which means “all” or “every”) Christ means all *kinds* of men—of all nations (Jew and Gentile, Revelation 5:9)—we have agreement with Paul in 1 Corinthians. Paul says that while the cross is foolishness to the Jews and a stumbling block to the Gentiles, “*unto them which are called, [the effectual call of the elect] both Jews and Greeks Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God*” (1 Corinthians 1:24).

⁴² Sumner, *An Examination of Tulip*, pp. 5, 6, emphasis Sumner’s.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p 22, emphasis Sumner’s.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p 10.

⁴⁶ Sumner, “Radical Calvinism!” p. 7, column 2.

⁴⁷ Alexander, p. 69.

⁴⁸ Rice, p. 73.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁵⁰ Douglas C. Macintosh in the forward to *Polity and Practice in Baptist Churches*, by William Roy McNutt, (Philadelphia, Penn., Judson Press, 1935).

© 2001 by Cause of God and Truth, see our [Copyright Notice](#)