

Mediate Theology
12 Supporting Propositions
by Dr. C. Gordon Olson
www.mediatetheology.org

1. God limited the exercise of His sovereignty by creating moral beings and delegating authority to them.

An inductive study of terms related to sovereignty reveals that God has not determined all that transpires in His universe beforehand. Starting in early chapters of Genesis God began to delegate significant areas of autonomy to angels and mankind. Satan's revolt against God and humanity's long history of self-determination must be factored into a definition of sovereignty. This is confirmed by the historical narrative of Scripture. Study of terms such as God's kingdom, decrees, counsel, and purpose reveal no hint of the Calvinistic view of sovereignty, which speaks much about God's decrees as all-encompassing. *But no such decree is mentioned in the Old Testament and the word is never used of God's decrees in the New.* Far too much dependence has been put upon one clause of Ephesians 1:11, which has been made to say far more than the grammar, syntax, and context allow.

2. Since the fall did not erase God's image in man, depravity does not mean total inability to respond to God's salvation message.

When God created man in His own image he made man responsible for his own actions, especially disobedience. In the fall that image was marred, but not lost. The human spirit was deadened, which meant spiritual death, alienation from God. Spiritual death is not just a figure of speech but literally involves the distinct human spirit. Human morality was corrupted, and although now a slave of sin, humanity's God-given autonomy was not withdrawn, but now is being abused in rebellion against God.

Original sin involves the imputation of Adam's sin to all mankind, as well as personal and transmitted sin. Calvinism's extrapolation of depravity into total inability of man to respond to God is insupportable. God and His witnesses consistently expected mankind to exercise their wills in a positive response to both general and special revelation. Indeed, we are commanded to choose and even to seek God.

3. Although Christ's death is particularly effective for individual believers, it is potentially available to all humanity.

This question arises primarily because of the extreme-Calvinistic doctrine of limited atonement*. The major response to that doctrine is that Christ's death is potential, provisional, and conditional in its application. Some terms for Christ's work on the cross are general in nature, others specific to individuals. The cross, in and of itself, saves no one, not even the 'elect.' Only those who respond positively to the gospel with repentant faith are saved. When studying the work of Christ on the cross it is necessary to recognize the distinction between propitiation, redemption, and reconciliation. Christ's death was substitutionary in nature, and yet takes away the sins of the whole world of sinners. Thus *propitiation* is the *objective* satisfaction for the sins of the whole world (1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10). The usage of the different Greek terms for *redemption* point in different directions. Three of the eight words for redemption are used in the *objective*, universal *ransom* sense; while three words relate to the *subjective redemption-liberation* phase and are limited to believers. Thus we may speak of a general propitiation, a ransom price paid for all, a limited redemption-liberation, and a limited reconciliation effective for only those individuals who embrace it. This duality is expressed in 1 Tim. 4:10: **“. . . the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.”**

*Most of the discussion over "limited" versus "unlimited atonement" is beside the point, since "atonement" is not a New Testament word and relates only to the Old Testament reference to the mercy seat in the temple

4. **The conviction of the Spirit mediately prepares sinners for faith.**

The critically important role of the convicting work of the Spirit was announced by Christ in John 16:8-11. We should view this as preparing the heart for faith and regeneration by breaking through the spiritual death and blindness which obstruct faith. This helps to explain how *any* spiritually dead sinner can come to saving repentant faith in Christ. We can best understand the ministry of the “other *paraclete* (from the Greek *paraklētos*; one who entreats, encourages, exhorts)” by noting the parallel with the first *paraclete*, Christ Himself. He most effectively used the Mosaic Law to bring about conviction of sin.

Since Christ predicted the coming of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the events in Acts 2 are the first example of the conviction of the Spirit as promised by Christ. The Holy Spirit, the divine Advocate, used Peter to charge the nation with the sin of crucifying Christ, and as a result, they were “**pierced to the heart**” and cried out, “**Brethren, what shall we do?**” They were under conviction but had not yet repented as seen in Peter’s response to, “**Repent!**” As the word of God is preached the Holy Spirit uses the word and brings some people under conviction. But not all who are brought under conviction ultimately repent and turn toward Christ.

5. **God’s calling to salvation is not irresistible.**

The doctrine of irresistible grace, like the doctrine of unconditional election, is based upon a number of unstated presuppositions. Foremost is that effectual calling necessarily implies irresistible grace, and that repentant faith is the immediate gift of God. This doctrine is loaded by the doctrine of unconditional election and the notion that regeneration precedes faith. John 6:37-65 is misused as a proof-text by failing to see the context in which Christ is speaking about the remnant of regenerate Jews who belonged to the Father and are being turned over to the Son and will certainly come to Him. From the many occurrences of the Greek words for calling used in an effectual sense, the following definition emerges: *Calling is God’s action in bringing the sinner to salvation, thus commissioning the believer to an exalted position with a new name for service to God.* It is used of the process and circumstances of our coming to faith viewed from the divine side, as contrasted with conversion, which is the human side. *The ‘called’ are those who have responded to the general invitation, and thus, by hindsight, the calling is seen as effectual.*

There are a number of passages which stand in direct contradiction to the notion of irresistible grace: Luke 7:30; Acts 7:51, 54; Matthew 13:1-43; 23:37; 1 Corinthians 4:15 & Philemon 10. Thus there is no historical or exegetical basis for irresistible grace, especially when contexts are carefully considered and presuppositions are examined.

6. **The new birth is conditioned on repentant faith.**

Repentant faith is the most important aspect of a mediate theology of salvation. Extreme Calvinists put the new birth before faith, since they believe that spiritually dead humans cannot exercise faith and, therefore, need to be born again before they can believe. It is revealing that the five points of ‘Calvinism’ do not even mention as central a concept as faith.

Related to this issue is the Calvinistic concept that faith is the immediate gift of God, in other words, the Holy Spirit gives faith to the elect like a bolt of lightning. Even if faith were a gift of God, we must recognize that it is given mediately through His word and the witness of others, rather than immediately or directly. Calvinistic proof-texts, such as Ephesians 2:8-10, have been pulled out of context to support this unbiblical notion. Although the new birth is an instantaneous work of the Spirit of God, *the process by which people come to faith involves heavy human involvement.* When studied inductively, it is overwhelmingly clear that faith is the condition of the new birth and, therefore, always precedes it. It may be hard to understand *how* those who are spiritually dead can hear, believe, and live, but as to the *fact*, Christ’s words are clear in John 5:25 that the *dead* can respond to his voice. It is man who is responsible to exercise repentant faith, not God to give it.

7. Repentant faith is the only condition for salvation.

Tracing through the Gospels and the apostolic proclamation of the good news, it becomes clear that repentance and faith are not two separate conditions for salvation, but are two sides of the one condition for sinners to be saved. However, it is important to biblically define repentance and faith. Baptism is not usually linked with repentant faith, from which it becomes clear that it is not a separate condition of salvation, but rather the first demand of discipleship.

8. Right standing and new birth are conditioned on repentant faith alone, apart from works.

Ever since Martin Luther trumpeted the watchword of the Reformation, not only did Roman Catholicism vigorously oppose it, but there has been a continuing erosion of this biblical truth among Protestants, and even Evangelicals. Both extreme Calvinists and Arminians have clearly added human performance to conditions for ultimate salvation. In the Calvinist case this is made manifest in the idea that one must *persevere* until the end in order to know for sure that you are saved. In Arminianism the concept of the loss of salvation because of a believer's sin following conversion is clearly a works-based added requirement.

In order to correctly understand the Reformation teaching of justification by faith alone, we need to clarify the relationship of faith alone (*sola fide*) to repentance/conversion and how this differs from the process of sanctification. It is clear that various theological movements have compromised the simplicity of the gospel.

9. Election/ foreordination are based upon foreknowledge.

There are only two passages which relate foreknowledge to foreordination, and *both maintain the same order; foreknowledge comes before foreordination.* (1 Peter 1:1-2; Rom. 8:28-31). In other words, God, in his omniscience and omnipresence, looks across eternity and sees the free-will actions of individuals. Those that freely choose His way of faith are ordained as citizens of His eternal kingdom. This view acknowledges the essential and significant distinction between foreknowledge and foreordination. The examination of these two passages using an inductive approach to word study and context leads to the conclusion that the use of the term 'predestinate' is a totally inappropriate translation; one that is almost totally derived from original errors in the Latin Vulgate (ca. AD 406). A much more appropriate rendering would be "those he did foreordain."

Turning to the concept of election, this same inductive approach leads to the conclusion that it may be best understood in terms of 'selection of the best, the choice, excellent.' This meaning is already in translations of some verses, but also is demanded by the context of others. Christ is the 'choice One,' and we have been made God's 'choice ones' positionally by His work of grace. This must be understood in the light of the choice of Israel, Christ as the "choice One" of the Father, and the biblical concept of corporate solidarity. In the light of these word studies, exegesis of Ephesians 1:3-14 reveals that the only election we have is "**in Christ,**" an emphasis repeated twenty times in the first two chapters, and that in this church epistle the context militates for corporate, not individual, election. A believer's repentant faith places him in Christ – in His church. This corporate body is the elect of God, of which the believer is a part.

10. True believers are eternally secure in Christ.

Although election is conditioned upon faith, the truly regenerated believer now participates in an unconditional aspect of salvation truth, the assurance of ultimate salvation. Overwhelming Scripture promises about eternal security are contradicted in the minds of both Arminians and some Calvinists by the warnings of Scripture, especially in the book of Hebrews. An inductive analysis of these passages shows no contradiction with eternal security. Far too much of the interpretation of these passages has been colored by the Calvinism-Arminianism debate.

We must distinguish the Calvinistic doctrine of the perseverance of the saints from the biblical teaching of eternal security. Calvinists have undermined the assurance of ultimate salvation through confusion with a believer's experiential sanctification. This has led to an introspective mindset, which seriously undermines assurance and is a serious back-loading of salvation with human performance.

11. Christ's discipleship teachings are a challenge to believers, not the way of salvation.

A serious compromise of justification by faith alone is the tendency of both Arminians and extreme Calvinists to interpret our Lord's discipleship teachings in Matthew 10 and 16, and Luke 9 and 14 as conditions of salvation, rather than as He intended them to be, a challenge to disciples' lifestyles.

The foundational pattern was set in Matthew 10 where the Lord sent out His regenerate Apostles with an extended warning of the persecution which they would face as they proclaim the good news. The exhortation to cross-bearing is not a condition for salvation, but rather of being *worthy* disciples. In Matthew 16 and Luke 9 the Lord repeated the challenge of cross-bearing to a larger group of dedicated disciples. Here He added the concept of self denial. The crucial word in this discourse is in Luke 9:23, where *daily cross-bearing* is stipulated, which clearly eliminates any consideration of this referring to conditions for salvation. The third context in Luke 14 expands the teaching to include counting the cost of true discipleship. To think that Christ is explaining that we have to pay a price for salvation contradicts salvation by grace.

Examination of Christ's salvation interviews with individuals, such as the Samaritan woman, Nicodemus, Matthew, the man born blind, the rich young ruler, and Zaccheus, confirms this.

12. Christ charged us to proclaim salvation on God's terms.

Christ's most important instruction at Caesarea Philippi (Mt. 16) has not only been distorted and usurped by the Roman church, but ignored and misunderstood by most Evangelicals. Despite the diversity of opinions about the identity of the Rock upon which the church was built, the evidence for Christ being that Rock is actually quite one-sided.

The victory of the church over the gates of Hades is best understood as a reference to His impending resurrection as the basis for the church's victory. As the Lord gave Peter the awesome responsibility of opening the door of faith to the nation Israel and subsequently to the Gentiles, He also charged him with the responsibility not to bind on earth what God has not already bound in heaven (as the Pharisees were doing), nor to release on earth what God has not already released in heaven (as the Sadducees were doing). Thus, it is an admonition to Peter, the Apostles, and us, to proclaim the good news on heaven's terms, unadulterated by man's traditions and philosophies.