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# The Doctrines of Grace in Calvin and Augustine

by Larry D. Sharp

*It is a long time since The Evangelical Quarterly published anything on Augustine in relation to Reformed theology. We recall an article on the Pelagian controversy by Professor James Barr — his first published article, incidentally, written while he was a theological student at New College, Edinburgh — which appeared in the Quarterly for October 1949. After examining Augustine's doctrine of grace, he concluded that "we cannot so easily claim him from Roman Catholicism" as some Reformed theologians have held. Dr. Sharp assesses Augustine's doctrine of grace by comparing it with Calvin's treatment of the same subject.*

Those of us who are persuaded that John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* was the best systematic expression of Protestant theology coming out of the Reformation would do well to read carefully the Anti-Pelagian writings of Augustine of Hippo. Outside the Bible Augustine was Calvin's greatest source. The *Institutes* and Calvin's other major writings are virtually flooded with quotations of the widely respected church father. Calvin even claimed to be merely restating Augustine on some points, and some Reformed interpreters of Augustine have practically made him out to be an early Calvinist.

The affinities between the two men are not merely legendary. Both argued vigorously that salvation is totally a gift of God's grace. Both tried to be faithful Paulinists. Nevertheless, these similarities have led to many unwarranted assumptions concerning the so-called "Augustine-Calvinistic tradition." My thesis is that Calvin goes considerably beyond Augustine in some crucial areas and that these differences are not now generally recognized. In some cases it appears that Calvin vastly improves on his teacher; in others he should probably have contented himself with only tertiary revisions. In any case, there is a need to compare their treatment of the doctrines of grace (in the Anti-Pelagian writings of Augustine and in the *Institutes* of 1559 by Calvin).

## I. ORIGINAL SIN

In the first years of his theological career Augustine was more under the influence of Christian Platonism than of the Bible. But by the year 406 he had become a convinced Paulinist and he began to come to grips with the origin of sin and death in Adam. By the time of the Anti-Pelagian writings, which are the focus of this study, he is clearly affirming his version of the classical doctrine of original sin.

Apparently Pelagius saw Adam's sin as simply a bad example which we need not follow. But to Augustine Adam's death in sin meant the death in sin of us all. That is, in the disobedience of Adam and Eve all

men fell into a state of sin and guilt. That first sin was committed by free will and thus the whole race fell from the original state of righteousness and sinlessness. This original sin is transmitted to later generations not merely by imitation but through the sexual procreation of the human race so that everyone is born already guilty and already with a corrupted nature that is prone to sin.

The essence of Adam's sin and of ours is concupiscence which may be defined as a selfish desire or lust and is the privation or absence of the selfless love for God involving the whole man and the whole of life. To the extent that Augustine makes original sin to be a privation of the good or an absence of the qualities of original righteousness, we may say that there is still here a trace of his earlier Neoplatonism.

The effect of Adam's sin is that man is now in a condition of sickness and weakness or a privation of health and strength. If it were possible for a person to be self-sufficient for fulfilling the law and for perfecting righteousness, then that person would be saved apart from instruction and faith in the death and resurrection of Christ. But, due to original sin, men are left darkened and weakened and in need of light and healing. Adam's sin then is a "wound," a "hurt," an "injury" which must be healed.<sup>1</sup> And so salvation is God's healing by grace the "sickness" of sin; he takes the element of health remaining and making it better and he takes what is weak and makes it stronger.

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Calvin followed Augustine in affirming the heart of the doctrine of original sin: that Adam's death in sin meant the death in sin of us all and that this state is passed down to all persons, even newborn infants. But for Calvin the essence of this sin is not mere self-love as in Augustine, but pride and rebellion and outright disobedience. Original sin is not merely a privation or an emptiness of original righteousness, but rather a blatant perversity which is always actively producing the works of the flesh.

The effect of Adam's sin is not only a wound and a sickness, as in Augustine, but is a total depravity and corruption. To describe sin as a lack of health and light and righteousness is to Calvin not to have "expressed effectively enough its power and energy."<sup>2</sup> The result of Adam's sin is more properly called the *ruin* of man than the *illness* of man.

## II. THE GRACE OF GOD

In the Anti-Pelagian writings Augustine does not give us a single

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<sup>1</sup> Augustine, *On Nature and Grace*, 10.21.

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.1.8.

definition of grace. As he most often uses the term it refers to God's healing *power* and is closely associated with the Holy Spirit and with God's poured-out love. That is, it is something infused in us in order to effect in us a new way of salvation based on God's forgiveness. Thus does Augustine say: "the grace of God . . . helps us as a medicine through the Mediator."<sup>3</sup>

But there are also many passages where Augustine uses the term to refer to the divine quality of mercy and love towards sinners, the basis whereby salvation is totally the gift of God. In fact there are so many such references to grace as something which resides in God and references to the divine mercy toward undeserving sinners, that it would be improper to accuse Augustine of underemphasizing the fact that it is the *character* of God in his sheer mercy which is the cause of the salvation of sinners. Thus does Augustine say of God's saving works: "he did this according to the riches of His grace, according to His good-will, which He purposed in His beloved Son . . ."<sup>4</sup>

86 Here the chief difference is that Calvin practically never uses the term grace to refer to God's power *in us* and certainly he could never think of grace as a medicine. Calvin followed Luther in attributing grace primarily if not exclusively to the character of God whereby he works through Jesus Christ to save sinners. It is not a healing power infused in believers, but is the benevolent and merciful nature of God revealed in Christ.

Whenever Calvin speaks of grace he immediately speaks of Christ. He affirms that "Scripture couples God's grace and Christ's merit."<sup>5</sup> When Calvin wants to talk about God's work *in us*, he posits the activity of the Holy Spirit in distinction from the grace of God in Christ. It is the Holy Spirit who is the "bond that unites us to Christ" and thus effects in us what the grace of God purposes for us. Augustine simply does not make this sharp distinction between the grace of God and the Holy Spirit.

### III. FAITH/WORKS/MERIT

Instead of being interested in a definite distinction between faith and works, Augustine seems more to be interested in bringing them together. His interpretation of Paul on this point is that we are not saved by works done in our own power or for our own glory. Rather we are

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<sup>3</sup> Augustine, *On Nature and Grace*, 67.80.

<sup>4</sup> Augustine, *Predestination of the Saints*, 18.37.

<sup>5</sup> Calvin, *Inst.* 2.17.2.

saved by a working faith, God's power and grace enabling us to do good works whereby we are saved.

Salvation, for Augustine, is totally the gift of God, totally unmerited. Yet God accomplishes salvation by bestowing on his elect the gifts of faith, works, and merits. The elect are saved not because they have generated faith, works and merits in their own power, but because these things are given by the grace of God. Only those who have faith, works, and merits are saved; but in reality these things are those which follow the giving of healing grace and result from a persevering submission in faith.

Calvin's approach to this subject is, of course, quite different. There is a profound concern to distinguish between faith and works and to eliminate altogether human merit in any sense. Faith is the "one sole means of recovering salvation."<sup>6</sup> Through faith "alone we obtain free righteousness by the mercy of God."<sup>7</sup> So important is it to Calvin that God's generous provisions for us in Christ are received by faith alone that he affirms this teaching to be "the main hinge on which religion turns."<sup>8</sup>

Good works, while altogether a vital part of the Christian life, nevertheless have no direct bearing on justification and salvation at all. In a sense good works of righteousness could indeed present us justified before God and saved, but, in fact, "we are destitute of them."<sup>9</sup> Calvin leaves us with no doubt as to what he thinks of his master Augustine's understanding of the relation of works and merits to justification:

For that matter, Augustine's view, or at any rate his manner of stating it, we must not entirely accept. For even though he admirably deprives man of all credit for righteousness and transfers it to God's grace, he still subsumes grace under sanctification, by which we are reborn in newness of life, through the Spirit.<sup>10</sup>

#### IV. JUSTIFICATION/SANCTIFICATION

For Augustine justification is God's gift of an actual righteousness. Through this gift of infused righteousness we are enabled to live a life which is pleasing to God and thereby be saved. In his comment on Romans 1:17 it is clear that for Augustine justification by faith means that through faith in Jesus Christ, which is itself a gift, God gives us

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 3.11.1.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.11.15.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

what “we now have, and shall have more and more, the ability of living righteously.”<sup>11</sup>

In commenting on the parable of the publican and the Pharisee in Luke 18, Augustine’s interpretation is that the Pharisee was in error not because he failed to recognize that he had no righteousness whatever, or that he failed to cry out for mercy in the very same manner as the publican, but that he “failed to ask for any further gift, just as if he stood in want of nothing for the increase or perfection of his righteousness.”<sup>12</sup> Here then is the essential teaching of Augustine: God in his mercy takes the good that is in us and makes it better, thus healing our sinful infirmities and rewarding us with eternal life. He takes what righteousness we already have and increases it by his healing grace and thereby are we saved.

88 Sanctification becomes then, for Augustine, essentially the same work as justification. Both are done by God; both are done in us; both then are done by us with God’s help. But the gift of infused righteousness, given through faith, and whereby we are saved, does not mean absolutely perfect righteousness; this we wait for in the future resurrection. Augustine wants to say that theoretically a Christian could possibly, through the help of God’s aid, live a life without sin, nevertheless “no man in the present life had ever lived, was living, or would live, of such perfect righteousness.”<sup>13</sup>

For Calvin, justification is God’s gift of the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. Through this gift of credited or reckoned righteousness we have a new standing before God, namely the same standing or position as that of Christ. This is not at all an infused righteousness, but an extraneous righteousness accomplished by Christ and totally outside ourselves. It has nothing to do whatever with our own righteousness or our own ability to live righteously.

When Calvin comments on the parable of the publican and the Pharisee, he says that the Pharisee was in error because his heart was not “utterly empty of all opinion of its own worth.”<sup>14</sup> We must banish from ourselves that arrogance of the Pharisee which “arises from a foolish persuasion of our own righteousness.”<sup>15</sup> Here then is the essential teaching of Calvin: God in his mercy gives us what we do not have, the righteousness of Christ, and thereby unites us to himself and gives us

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<sup>11</sup> Augustine, *Spirit and Letter*, 11.18.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.22.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 35.62.

<sup>14</sup> Calvin, *Inst.*, 3.12.7.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.12.7.

eternal life. He covers our totally depraved selves with the absolute purity and righteousness of Christ and by this imputed righteousness of Christ and by this imputed righteousness we are saved.

Sanctification is for Calvin, in a logical if not a chronological sense, an entirely different work from justification. Those whom God justifies he at the same time sanctifies. Sanctification is the process of growth in holiness and piety throughout life. As in Augustine, it is never complete in this life and will be perfected only at the resurrection. Both sanctification and justification are done by God, but with this difference: justification is done *for* us, not *in* us as with sanctification.

#### V. PREDESTINATION/REPROBATION

Since salvation is the gift of God, and since there are clearly some who do not receive this gift, it must be that God in his mercy has from all eternity elected or chosen some to be saved and has left others to be justly condemned. This is Augustine's doctrine of predestination. All men stand justly condemned by their own fault and will; therefore no one can properly lay claim to life and redemption. God, having concluded all men justly and fairly damned, is free to choose to give grace to some, and He did this before the creation of the world. Far from being a matter of arbitrariness on God's part, it is rather a matter of His utmost mercy and free grace. Why God chooses to give the gift to some and not others is left to the mystery of God's righteousness. Who are we to question God? He is free and just to do as he pleases.

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Augustine did not teach double predestination. That is, he did not teach that in the same way in which God chose some he also reprobated others. Predestination is for him a positive doctrine of God's grace whereby he chose some for eternal life and is, therefore, not in any direct sense to be accused of a deliberate rejection of others. The elect are justly condemned sinners and the non-elect are justly condemned sinners. That he chooses the former for life is an act of mercy; that he leaves the latter to the proper recompense for their sins is an act of justice.

Augustine notes that in the whole process of redemption God takes the initiative. He sent his Son to die and rise for us; he sent preachers to declare the gospel to us; he sent the Holy Spirit to convict us of sin and give the ability and desire to believe. And yet all of these things were in the mind of God from all eternity. By predestination Augustine means to encompass practically the whole scope of grace and redemption. "He did this according to His good-will, which He purposed in His beloved Son."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Augustine, *Predestination of the Saints*, 18.37.

For the same reasons and in much the same manner as Augustine, Calvin affirms what he believes to be the Scriptural doctrine of predestination. Calvin felt that he was merely restating Augustine here, but in fact, he adds as his own the doctrine of reprobation. Reprobation increasingly became important to Calvin so that by the time of the last edition of the *Institutes* his very definition of predestination is not only that God in his mercy "adopts some to hope of life," but that he also "sentences others to eternal death."<sup>17</sup>

Calvin then is not as careful as Augustine is to establish the justice of God *prior* to his election. Calvin wants to move election right back into the realm of God's first purposes for creating mankind, so that He "compactd with himself what he willed to become of each man."<sup>18</sup> Instead of affirming that all men stand first of all in an equal condition of being justly condemned for their sins *before* God mercifully decides to save some, Calvin strides right ahead and announces that "all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death."<sup>19</sup>

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## VI. FREE WILL

Augustine does try to give a full and sufficient place to free will in the scheme of redemption. At no stage in the process of redemption is free will denied. Augustine is concerned to show that man is fully responsible for his choices. If one rejects grace, he does so freely and voluntarily, not by compulsion. If one chooses to receive God's mercy, it is also done freely and voluntarily. No one is forced to sin and no one is forced to believe. In this connection he affirms that free will does not perish with the original sin. What did perish was man's freedom "to have a full righteousness with immortality."<sup>20</sup>

But his free will is always subsumed underneath the sovereign grace and power of God so that the exercise of free will is never really apart from God's grace. Just as a righteous life and faith are both gifts of God's grace, so also free will is a gift of God's grace. But free will is not thereby denied; it is simply attributed along with all our other undeserved gifts to the grace and power of God.

For it is certain that we keep the commandments if we will; but because the

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<sup>17</sup> Calvin, *Inst.*, 3.21.5.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Augustine, *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians*, 2.5.

will is prepared by the Lord, we must ask of him for such a force of will as suffices to make us act by the willing. It is certain that it is we that will when we will, but it is He who makes us will what is good . . . It is certain that it is we that act when we act; but it is He who makes us act, by applying efficacious powers to our will.<sup>21</sup>

Though he speaks favourably of Augustine's emphasis on the power of God enabling the will to respond to grace, nevertheless, Calvin says that the very term "free will" should be "abolished" and he advises others "to avoid it."<sup>22</sup> Calvin feels that any doctrine of free will is always in danger of robbing God in his honour; therefore he wants vigorously to deny any place to *free* will in the scheme of redemption.

Whereas Augustine was concerned to emphasize how man is fully responsible for his choices, Calvin is concerned to show how man's nature is so utterly corrupt as to require a total renewal of his mind and will. For after the original sin, man was left with a will, but it was not really free; it was rather enslaved to sin and remains so until God in his grace frees it in the conversion of the elect. Calvin does not hesitate to describe this conversion as a "necessity" which "God does quite alone."<sup>23</sup>

#### VII. PERSEVERANCE/ASSURANCE

Augustine believed that the elect are also given the gift of perseverance along with the other gifts which are all a part of the process of salvation. That is, they are given the ability to persevere in faith and works and holiness to the end of their lives so that they will finally be saved. But this perseverance is a gift prepared only for those who seek it. None of the elect will fail to seek it nor to possess it, so therefore none of the elect can in reality fail to persevere and thus be finally saved. Of the elect it is said by Augustine: "none of the saints fails to keep his perseverance in holiness even to the end."<sup>24</sup> So then the elect are saved by the gift and grace of God, but they are not thereby saved apart from prayer and works and obedience.

Yet this does not mean that every present believer cannot fall away, in serious sin or unbelief, and be finally lost. It is always true that if one should "fall before he dies, he is, of course, said not to have persevered; and most truly it is said."<sup>25</sup> Augustine is saying that it is always known

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<sup>21</sup> Augustine, *Grace and Free Will*, 16.32.

<sup>22</sup> Calvin, *Inst.*, 2.2.8.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.3.6.

<sup>24</sup> Augustine, *The Gift of Perseverance*, 5.9.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.1.

only to God who are the elect, while to us it can never be absolutely certain who is among the elect and who therefore will persevere in holiness to the end and be finally saved. If a person dies having been faithful to the end, then and only then, we may pronounce that in all probability that individual was among the elect. Augustine put it this way:

But it seems to men that all who *appear* good believers ought to receive perseverance to the end. But God has judged it to be better to mingle some who would not persevere with a certain number of His saints, so that those for whom security from temptation in this life is not desirable may not be secure. For that which the apostle says, checks many from mischievous elation: "Wherefore let him who seems to stand take heed lest he fall."<sup>26</sup>

Augustine does have a doctrine of personal assurance of salvation. It is rather weak but it is there. In advocating preaching on predestination in a positive and encouraging manner, he implies that so long as a believer is living in faithful obedience to God he may assume himself to be among the elect and among those who will persevere to the end. It is a kind of assurance mixed with trembling, but it at least intends to rid the faithful of despair and hopelessness.

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In this connection he advocates preaching on election in this manner: "But if any obey, and are not predestined to His Kingdom and glory, they are only for a season, and shall not continue in that obedience unto the end."<sup>27</sup> Augustine means that instead of doubting and despairing as to whether he is among the elect, the believer should take note that he has not yet apostasized and should instead be "hoping and praying for better things."<sup>28</sup> He even says that believers ought to pray daily for deliverance from temptation, "and in doing this ought to trust that you are *not* aliens from the predestination of His people."<sup>29</sup> So although we cannot have *absolute* certainty, we can have prayerful hope and trust and can rejoice in our God with trembling as we daily say to Him, "Lead us not into temptation."

Like Augustine Calvin believes that the elect will be given "the gift of perseverance" whereby they are kept under the shepherding care of Christ so that "their faith may never fall" and "their godliness be kept constant."<sup>30</sup> In Calvin the prominent concern is that Christ will care for the elect so that they will not fall away. He also insists that this

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.19.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.61.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.62.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Calvin, *Inst.*, 3.24.6.

perseverance is never permanently separated from prayer and works and obedience. "Those who by true faith are righteous prove their righteousness by obedience and good works, not by a rare and imaginary mask."<sup>31</sup>

In a genuine, but definitely weaker manner than Augustine, Calvin also concedes that some present believers may, and often do, fall away. He says: "... we are taught . . . that call and faith are of little account unless perseverance be added; and this does not happen at all."<sup>32</sup> So then not all who have been called and who believe persevere; and those who do not thereby prove themselves not to be among the elect. In this connection Calvin acknowledges several Bible verses which warn believers not to apostasize and which "dissuade us from overassurance."<sup>33</sup>

Calvin even believes that some among the non-elect receive the same "special" calling as the elect believer and that "by the inward illumination of his Spirit he causes the preached Word to dwell in their hearts." Yet these believe and partake only temporarily and they fall away and rebel into an "even greater blindness."<sup>34</sup> There is another category of those who are within the "church on profession of faith" but who by their "baseness" and lack of true faith will at last be cast out. This mixture of true elect believers and some hypocrites and temporary believers in the visible church is sufficient to rule out any antinomian tendencies or any "once-saved-always-saved" notions in the thought of Calvin.

But Calvin clearly disagrees with Augustine in the question of whether we can be sure that we are among the elect. To Calvin not only can a believer have personal assurance of his election; he quite misunderstands the doctrine of election if he does not gain assurance by it. "Predestination, rightly understood, brings no shaking of faith but rather its best confirmation."<sup>35</sup> Calvin says that hypocrites and temporary believers cannot and do not have the "heartfelt trust" and "true faith" which only are in the elect as they seek "the word of the gospel." So in Calvin there is a combination as in Augustine (though the emphasis is reversed), of personal certainty and assurance through a deeply rooted and fruit-bearing faith and at the same time an acknowledgement that the apostle Paul "also requires fear" of falling

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.17.12.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.24.6.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.24.8.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.24.9.

away in the believer, so that "our trust in him may in no wise be diminished."<sup>36</sup>

#### VII. PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS

It is clearly a mistake to try to read Calvin's doctrine of total depravity into Augustine as some have done. Calvin was not influenced, as Augustine was, by traces of Greek philosophy, and thus he better captured the biblical teaching on the utter ruin of man after the Fall and of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Augustine's doctrine of original sin, while acceptable as far as it goes, is faulted for the very reason that it does not go far enough. By removing any semblance of real righteousness from the nature of man, Calvin did go far enough and his doctrine of original sin is, in my judgement, to be preferred.

94 Augustine's understanding of grace as a healing power is also inadequate, but this is not to suggest that Augustine failed fully to affirm that grace is also the loving character of God. Undoubtedly it is this very emphasis on grace which attracted the Reformers to begin with; they must have been delighted to discover this champion of grace in the ancient church! If for no other reason than this wonderful triumph of grace in the theology of Augustine, the Reformation may justly be called a "revival of Augustinianism." But fortunately, Calvin, following Luther, improved on Augustine even here, and since the Reformation the consensus of biblical scholarship has supported this interpretation of grace as the forgiving character *in God* and not God's healing power *in us*.

It is unfortunate that Augustine failed to understand the apostle Paul on the matters of faith, works and merits, and I think that we must judge that he did. Salvation cannot be by both God's grace through faith *and* by human merit through works; it must be by one or the other as Calvin and Luther clearly saw.

But Augustine's worst error was not in missing Paul on merits, but in missing him in justification. One is compelled to ask how it is that so few of the ancient fathers failed to understand Paul's doctrine of reckoned or imputed righteousness? Or again (I speak as an evangelical Protestant, of course), how could anyone ever presume to present to God an imperfect and corrupted life, at the very best, as being acceptable to the holy and perfect God for eternal fellowship with him?

There is still a widespread assumption that Calvin and Augustine taught essentially the same doctrine of predestination. As we have seen,

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.24.7.

this simply is not the case. In my opinion, Augustine fares better on this doctrine than does Calvin. Due probably to the nature of controversy, Calvin simply overstates, in my view, the doctrine of election until he finally was saying more than Scripture says and more than is necessary in any case. Many fine Calvinist scholars, who otherwise love and appreciate Calvin and his theology, now recognize this weakness in his position. I would like to offer Augustine's expression of election as the best alternative. In my judgement, it is much more balanced, fully satisfying the need to let God be sovereign in his justice and in his merciful justification of the elect. Let us not forget that Paul normally speaks of predestination in the context of the comfort and hope of the elect believer and within the total purview of God's glorious purposes for the world. Whenever the concept is pushed too far, it becomes something other than this.

In my own thinking, we may rule out the notion that there is any such thing as an *absolutely free* human will since the fall of man in Adam. Neither Calvin nor Augustine would disagree with me here. But there is another side of this coin: the biblical writers do not indicate that in the process of calling and regenerating and justifying and sanctifying sinners, God is forcing himself altogether *against* our wills in order to accomplish these things. In one sense much of the Bible is addressed to our wills, calling us, rebuking us, encouraging us. These passages just do not make sense if we deny any place for a voluntarism in man which, in the case of the elect, though prepared and enabled totally by the Holy Spirit, nevertheless involves always a *willing* response to God and never an unwilling one. Aside from the question of terms (I somewhat agree with Calvin's objection to "free" will), I still find Augustine to be very helpful, and I again suggest that an Augustinian understanding of the human will is quite compatible with an essential evangelical Calvinism.

As we have seen, Calvin and Augustine did not in fact teach the current popular doctrine of "eternal security." Though enemies and friends alike have ascribed this position to them both, it is definitely contrary to the facts. Both men taught that it is absolutely necessary that a believer must persevere in faith and faithfulness to the end of life in order to be finally saved. Both men taught that some present believers would not in fact thus persevere and thus would not in fact be saved. Both men acknowledged that there are many serious admonitions in Scripture against apostasy which are addressed to all believers. I suggest that Augustine's doctrine of perseverance and assurance is needed today as a corrective toward a more balanced biblical teaching. Augustine's relation of perseverance to predestination is appealing to me for the very reason that he does not thereby lapse into the common supposition of

once-converted-automatically-home-free. His assertion that “only God knows” who is and who is not elect is quite congruous with biblical teaching on election, and, in any case, he properly asserts that the truly elect are manifest precisely by the fact that they are enabled by God’s grace to continue to believe and obey to the end of their lives and thus are saved. It seems that Augustine’s only weakness was to leave the sincere and obedient believer with only a morsel of personal assurance of his election. It is at this point that Calvin provides us with what we really need: a solid doctrine of the necessity of persevering to the end of one’s life, including an emphasis on personal assurance coupled with just enough caution of the possibility of falling away. It is certain, in this regard, that Calvin did not teach that some believers who did not persevere in holy living and believing would nevertheless receive eternal life because they had at one time been real believers. Calvin rightly followed Augustine in denying assurance of salvation to those living in clear disobedience to God.

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