The Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) was founded by the industry and endeavor of Ignatius of Loyola. This fiery Roman Catholic zealot dedicated his life to the defense of the Roman Church against the "heresies" of the Protestant Reformation. Toward the end of his life he wrote the following:

Seeing the progress which the heretics have made in a short time, spreading the poison of their evil teaching throughout so many countries and peoples, and making use of the verse of the Apostles to describe their progress, And their speech spreadeth like a canker', it would seem that our society [i.e., the Jesuits], having been accepted by Divine Providence among the efficacious means to repair such great damage, should be solicitous to prepare the proper steps, such as are quickly applied and can be widely adopted, thus exerting itself to the utmost of its powers to preserve what is still sound and to restore what has fallen sick of the plague of heresy, especially in the northern nations.

The heretics have made their false theology popular and presented it in a way that is within the capacity of the common people. They preach it to the people and teach it in the schools, and scatter booklets which can be bought and understood by many, and make their influence felt by means of their writings when they cannot do so by their preaching. Their success is largely due to the negligence of those who should have shown some interest; and the bad example and the ignorance of Catholics, especially the clergy, have made such ravages in the vineyard of the Lord.

For if we believe it to be true, that God fore-knows and fore-ordains all things; that He can be neither deceived nor hindered in His Prescience and Predestination; and that nothing can take place but according to His Will, (which reason herself is compelled to confess;) then, even according to the testimony of reason herself, there can be no "Free-will"

—In man, —in angel, —or in any creature!

Martin Luther
One of the charges Loyola made to his followers involved the danger of allowing the Protestants to so emphasize the power of God that the "freedom of man" would be eclipsed. One of his followers, Luis de Molina, dedicated many years attempting to fulfill the vision of Loyola. He finally produced an entire philosophical theory of divine knowledge called scientia media (the concept of "middle knowledge"): the idea that God knows what free agents will do given certain circumstances, but their actions are still "free" in the sense that they are not fixed.

The entire reason why the concept was developed was to "get around" the preaching of the Reformers that emphasized the sovereignty of God, the freedom of God, as ultimate in all things. The "heretics" were preaching that God is the Potter, men are the clay, formed as He wills, not as they will. Such a teaching was devastating to the Roman concept of the Church as the mediator and dispenser of graces. Such a system could speak often of grace as long as that grace was merely a necessary aid but never an efficient power that saves. As long as the ultimate "control" of salvation was kept out of God's bands, all would be well. Sadly, to this very day, nominal "Protestants" embrace Molina's desperate attempt to get around God's freedom.

Loyola was not the first to see the Reformed emphasis upon the freedom of God and the creatureliness of men as a deadly threat to Roman Catholic theology. In fact, the first written debate of the Reformation itself was focused on the very same issue....
So many are quick to say, “Oh yes, I believe in the sovereignty of God.” Yet, when pressed to believe consistently that God truly can do as He pleases without getting permission from anyone, including man, we discover that many who in fact confess such a belief in practice deny it.

**the vital issue**

As Martin Luther closed his monumental response to the Roman Catholic scholar and theologian, Desiderius Erasmus, titled, *The Bondage of the Will*, he made it plain how he believed that the issue of God’s absolute freedom and man’s absolute dependence is, in fact, the very central issue of the entire Reformation. He affirmed, with clarity you will only rarely bear in modern Lutheran preachers or theologians, the utter dependence of man upon God:

> For if we believe it to be true, that God fore-knows and foreordains all things; that He can be neither deceived nor hindered in His Prescience and Predestination; and that nothing can take place but according to His Will, (which reason herself is compelled to confess;) then, even according to the testimony of reason herself, there can be no "Free-will" – In man, – in angel, – or in any creature!

But take careful note of how this great Reformer understood the absolute centrality of God’s freedom and man’s bondage in sin:

> In this, moreover, I give you (Erasmus) great praise, and proclaim it—you alone in preeminent distinction from all others, have entered upon the thing itself; that is, the grand turning point of the cause; and have not wearied me with those irrelevant points about popery, purgatory, indulgences, and other like baubles, rather than causes, with which all have hitherto tried to hunt me down,—though in vain! You, and you alone saw, what was the grand hinge upon which the whole turned, and therefore you attacked the vital part at once; for which, from my heart, I thank you.

A more modern translation of the passage goes like this:

> Moreover, I give you hearty praise and commendation on this further account — that you alone, in contrast to all others, have attacked the real thing, that is, the essential issue. You have not wearied me with those extraneous issues about the Papacy, purgatory, indulgences and such like—trifles, rather than issues—in respect of which almost all to date have sought my...
blood (though without success); you, and you alone, have seen
the binge on which all turns, and aimed for the vital Spot.

Do not allow Luther's words to pass you by. We must understand what
Luther meant by "the thing itself" or "the real thing." What is "the cause,"
"the whole," "on which all turns? To what does he refer? To the very
Reformation itself! Luther is speaking to his Roman Catholic opponent about
the very essential and definitional issue of the entire Reformation. What,
then, is the "grand turning point of the cause," the "essential" the "grand
hinge upon which the whole turned," and "the vital part? The truth of
predestination (God's freedom) and man's depravity (his will in bondage)! Here at
the very inception of the Reformation the definitional issue is laid out: God
is the absolutely free Creator, the Potter, who has complete sovereignty
over the pots, humans, who, as fallen creatures, find their wills enslaved to
sin, in bondage and unable to "cooperate" with any offered grace.

This is the soil from which springs the Reformed emphasis upon sola fide,
"faith alone," the truth that one is justified not by any meritorious action or
work but by faith in Jesus Christ alone. One cannot claim to be faithful to the
Reformation by crying "sola fide" when the foundation of that call is abandoned.
The truth that God saves by Himself, by His own power, on the basis of His
own will, defines the message of the Reformers. Those who follow their lead
are convinced that their faith is founded firmly upon the consistent
interpretation of Scripture alone (sola scriptura) and all of Scripture (tota
scriptura). One cannot claim to stand in harmony with Luther, Zwingli,
Bucer, or Calvin without believing both in the doctrine of justification by
faith as well as the truth of God's absolute freedom and man's bondage in
sin.

Few have had the ability to speak with the clarity and force of Charles
Haddon Spurgeon, the great Baptist evangelist of London. Regarding this
issue he wrote:

There is no attribute of God more comforting to His children
than the doctrine of Divine Sovereignty. Under the most adverse
circumstances, in the most severe troubles, they believe that
Sovereignty bath ordained their afflictions, that Sovereignty
overrules them, and that Sovereignty will sanctify them all.
There is nothing for which the children of God ought more
earnestly to contend than the dominion of their Master over all
creation — the kingship of God over all the works of His own
hands — the throne of God, and His right to sit upon that throne.

On the other hand, there is no doctrine more hated by worldlings, no truth
of which they have made such a football, as the great, stupendous, but yet
most certain doctrine of the Sovereignty of the infinite Jehovah. Men will
allow God to be everywhere except upon His throne. They will allow Him to
be in His workshop to fashion worlds and to make stars. They will allow Him
to be in His alimony to dispense His alms and bestow His bounties. They
will allow Him to sustain the earth and bear up the pillars thereof, or light
the lamps of Heaven, or rule the waves of the ever-moving ocean; but when
God ascends His throne, His creatures then gnash their teeth; and when we
proclaim an enthroned God, and His right to do as He wills with His own, to
dispose of His creatures as He thinks well, without consulting them in the
matter, then it is that we are hissed and execrated, and then it is that men
turn a deaf ear to us, for God on His throne is not the God they love. They
love Him anywhere better than they do when He sits with His scepter in His
hand and His crown upon His head. But it is God upon the throne that we
love to preach. It is God upon His throne whom we trust.

The Christian loves God as He reveals Himself. The non-Christian seeks to
conform God to an image that is less threatening to him in his rebellion. It
is a work of grace in the heart that allows a person to love God as God really
is, not as we wish He would be. The Christian desires to love God truly.
This is the single issue that separates the supernatural religion of Christianity from the man-centered religions that surround us. Whether the work of salvation is perfectly accomplished by God for His own glory or is dependent upon man's cooperation and assistance is the watershed issue that separates biblical Christianity from everything else. The specifics of the debate revolve around what it means to confess that "salvation is of the Lord." What does this necessarily mean with reference to man's abilities (or inabilities)? What does this tell us about the atoning work of Christ, or the perfection of Christ's work of salvation? These are the issues of the debate.

**the thrust of this work**

The writer of this work has absolute confidence that the Reformed proclamation of the Gospel will never pass from this world, and that the work of Christ's kingdom represented by that proclamation will continue until He rules and reigns. Why? Because God's Word will never fall. As long as the Holy Scriptures exist and the Holy Spirit brings regeneration in the hearts of men, the message of God's free and glorious grace will continue.

The message of the gospel of grace is, first and foremost, a biblical message. It is not philosophy that leads the Reformed believer to his or her conclusions: it is biblical exegesis that does so. And for this reason the firm ground upon which the true Calvinist stands in defense of his belief in the absolute freedom of God is the text of Holy Writ. Because of this conviction, this work will focus primarily upon biblical issues. The argumentation provided by Dr. [Norman] Geisler, and other proponents of a non-Reformed position, falls upon exegetical examination.

**a necessary definition**

What are the "doctrines of grace," and why do they matter? Such is like asking, "What does the Bible teach about the very heart of the gospel, and does it matter one way or the other?" The doctrines of grace are the biblical teachings that define the goal and means of God's perfect work of redemption. They tell us that God is the one who saves, for His own glory, and freely. And they tell us that He does so only through Christ, only on the basis of His grace, only with the perfection that marks everything the Father, Son, and Spirit do. The doctrines of grace separate the Christian faith from the works-based religions of men. They direct us away from ourselves and solely to God's grace and mercy. They destroy pride, instill humility, and exalt God. And that's why so many invest so much time in the vain attempt to undermine their truth. The religions of men maintain authority over their followers by 1) limiting God's power, 2) exalting man's abilities, and 3) "channeling" God's power through their own structures. A perfect salvation that is freely bestowed by God for His own glory is not a "system" that can be controlled by a religious body or group. And even more importantly, such a system is destructive of any sense of pride in the creature man, and if there is anything man's religions must safeguard, it is man's "self-esteem."

In our modern setting the debate is normally framed by the famous "Five Points of Calvinism." These have historically been defined as follows:

**T = Total Depravity:** Man is dead in sin, completely and radically impacted by the Fall, the enemy of God, incapable of saving himself. This does not mean that man is as evil as he could be. Nor does it mean that the image of God is destroyed, or that the will is done away with. Instead, it refers to the all pervasiveness of the effects of sin, and the fact that man is, outside of Christ, the enemy of God.

**U = Unconditional Election:** God elects a specific people unto Himself.
without reference to anything they do. This means the basis of God's choice of the elect is solely within Himself: His grace, His mercy, His will. It is not man's actions, works, or even foreseen faith, that "draws" God's choice. God's election is unconditional and final.

L = Limited Atonement: Since it is God's purpose to save a special people for Himself, and He has chosen to do so only through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ, Christ came to give His life "a ransom for many" so as to "save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). The intention of Christ in His cross-work was to save His people specifically. Therefore, Christ's sacrifice is perfect and complete, for it actually accomplishes perfect redemption.

I = Irresistible Grace: This is the belief that God is able to raise the spiritually dead sinner to life. This is an act of efficient grace. When God chooses to bring one of His elect to spiritual life, it is an act similar to when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead: just as Lazarus was incapable of resisting the power of Christ in raising him from the dead, so too the dead sinner is incapable of resisting the power of God that raises him to spiritual life. This is not to say that men have not resisted God's grace. This doctrine speaks specifically to the grace that brings regeneration, not to individual acts of sin committed by believers or unbelievers.

P = Perseverance of the Saints: Some prefer saying "the preservation of the saints" to emphasize that this is the work of God: others use the phrase "eternal security" to emphasize the impossibility of God's perfect work of salvation being undone. But whatever one calls it, it is the belief that when Christ saves one of His elect, He will not fail to keep that saved person throughout life and bring them safely into His presence. It is, in short, the belief that Christ is able to save perfectly.

Historically, the debate goes back long before the Reformation, however. One can trace the argument back through the centuries, through men such as Gottschalk of Orbals, all the way back to Augustine and Pelagius in the fifth century. But really the issue can be found clearly addressed in the New Testament itself, so we should not be surprised that it remains an ever-new issue with each generation that comes along. Sin causes man to constantly seek to insert himself into the work of God in salvation, so every generation has to be reminded of their complete dependence upon Him and of His perfect freedom.

That is one reason why I do not believe the common "five points" listed above is enough for today. There is a sixth point, one that lies at the head of the list, that must be firmly proclaimed and defended today: the freedom of God. While it may have been taken for granted a few centuries ago, today it is surely a belief under fire. But since it lies at the very heart of the debate, we need to begin with a discussion of what it means.

Theater and proper kingship of GOD

I believe one of the reasons modern men struggle with some of the plain biblical truths of old is because so few of us any longer have a "king." Royal power and authority was fundamental when the Scriptures were written, and often the power of God to properly rule over His own creation is likened to the power of a king to rule over his realm. Since most of us do not bow to a king, we see little reason why we should bow to God.

The phrase "the free and proper kingship of God" is a rather verbose means of saying "God's sovereignty." So why do I use the longer phrase? Because it has become "fashionable" to confess belief in "the sovereignty of God." How can anyone read the Bible and not hear its constant testimony to the unfettered, unlimited, undiminished authority of God to do as He wishes with His creation?
So many are quick to say, "Oh yes, I believe in the sovereignty of God." Yet, when pressed to believe consistently that God truly can do as He pleases without getting permission from anyone, including man, we discover that many who in fact confess such a belief in practice deny it. Just a few passages that testify to this are as follows:

Whatever the LORD pleases, He does,  
In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps.  
| Psalm 135:6 |

For the LORD of hosts has planned,  
and who can frustrate it?  
And as for His stretched-out hand,  
who can turn it back?  
| Isaiah 14:27 |

Remember the former things long past,  
For I am God, and there is no other;  
I am God, and there is no one like Me,  
Declaring the end from the beginning,  
And from ancient times  
things which have not been done,  
Saying, "My purpose will be established,  
And I will accomplish all My good pleasure.  
| Isaiah 46:9–10 |

Let all the earth fear the LORD;  
Let all the inhabitants of the world  
stand in awe of Him.  
For He spoke, and it was done;  
He commanded, and it stood fast.  
The LORD nullifies the counsel of the nations;  
He frustrates the plans of the peoples.  
The counsel of the LORD stands forever,  
The plans of His heart from  
generation to generation.  
| Psalm 3 3:8–11 |

"Present your case," the LORD says.  
"Bring forward your strong arguments,"  
The King of Jacob says.  
Let them bring forth and declare to us  
what is going to take place;  
As for the former events, declare what they were,  
That we may consider them and know their outcome.  
Or announce to us what is coming;  
Declare the things that are going to come afterward,  
That we may know that you are gods;  
Indeed, do good or evil, that we may anxiously look about  
us and fear together.  
| Isaiah 41:21–23 |

The king’s heart is like channels of water  
in the hand of the LORD;  
He turns it wherever He wishes.  
| Proverbs 21: 1 |

But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar,  
raised my eyes toward heaven  
and my reason returned to me,  
and I blessed the Most High and praised  
and honored Him who lives forever;  
For His dominion is an everlasting dominion,  
And His kingdom endures from generation to generation.
All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,
But He does according to His will in the host of heaven
And among the inhabitants of earth;
And no one can ward off His hand
Or say to Him, 'What have You done?'
|Daniel 4:34–35|

The biblical testimony could be expanded almost indefinitely. God is king over all the earth. As the Creator, it is His to do with as He chooses. This concept is brought out with striking clarity in the analogy of the Potter and the clay. A number of times in Scripture God likens Himself to a Potter and we as clay or as pots, formed and fashioned as He wishes. This sovereign power is seen in God’s dealings with Israel. He sent Jeremiah the prophet to the potter’s house, and recorded this incident in Jeremiah 18:4–6:

But the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter; so he remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make. Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, “Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter does?” declares the LORD. “Behold, like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel.”

God could refashion and remake Israel as He pleased. He did not have to ask permission, seek advice, or in any way consult anyone or anything outside of Himself. The entire nation was as the clay in the potter’s hand. Clay has no inherent “rights,” no basis upon which to complain about the potter’s decisions, no say in what the potter does.

The vast gulf that separates the created from the Creator is highlighted in these words from Isaiah 29:16 (NIV):

You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, “He did not make me”? Can the pot say of the potter, "He knows nothing"?

The very idea of "what is formed" speaking to the one who formed it is supposed to strike within us the absurdity of man, the creature, thinking that God is to be thought of as existing on the same plane, the same level, as man. Man’s every thought of God should be marked with reverential awe, with true fear of the One who formed us and gives us every breath we take. The sheer stupidity of man arguing with his Maker comes up yet again a little later in Isaiah 45:9:

"Woe to the one who quarrels with his Maker — An earthenware vessel among the vessels of earth! Will the clay say to the potter, 'What are you doing?' Or the thing you are making say, 'He has no hands'?

Sarcasm and irony are tools the Lord uses to emphasize the utter foolishness of man arguing with God. "Will the clay say to the potter, 'What are you doing?'" Clay by nature is under the sovereign power of the potter. It is a thing to be formed and used as the potter desires. In comparison with the potter, the clay is utterly powerless. There can be no clash of wills between the Potter and the pots. The Potter's will is free and unfettered by any considerations the clay may present. What is more, the pot is forced to recognize the active involvement of the potter. This is seen in the argumentum ad absurdum, "Or the thing you are making say, 'He has no hands.'" The thing "being made" cannot deny the very hands that are forming and fashioning its very shape! And yet this is the very attitude of man today: there is no Creator, and all evidence of His existence must be immediately
dismissed. And even amongst those who embrace the Christian faith, there is a hesitance to confess God as Creator, God as *determiner* of my shape and my destiny.

The people of God gladly confess that they are "God's pots," creatures made by His hand. Hear these words:

> But now, O LORD, You are our Father,  
> We are the clay, and You our potter;  
> And all of us are the work of Your hand.  

| Isaiah 64:8 |

The renewed heart *rejoices* in knowing that God is our Father, our Creator, the Potter who has formed us by His own hand. But such a thought is utter terror to the unregenerate person, and completely *anathema* to the religions of men who seek to control God and His power through the exercise of man's will.

### The decrees of the king

The conjunction of God's absolute freedom and His Creatorship results in the doctrine of God's decrees: the soul comforting truth that God has wisely and perfectly decreed whatsoever comes to pass in this universe. Nothing is outside His control, nothing is without purpose. There are no "renegade atoms" in the universe, nothing that is beyond the positive decree of God. This extends not only to inanimate objects (galaxies, stars, planets, earthquakes, hurricanes, landslides, etc.) but to every aspect of human history, personal relationships, and most importantly, to the life of every man, woman, and child. While many are content to allow God to control the "big things" like hurricanes and the natural realm, it is the assertion that God's freedom extends to the actions of men, *even to their choices*, that meets with immediate rejection. But the Bible is clear on the matter. Three scriptural witnesses will testify to this truth.

One of the most striking evidences of God's sovereign control over the affairs of men is hidden from a cursory reading of the Scriptures. It is buried in some of the history of the Old Testament. Think carefully about these words:

> Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger  
> And the staff in whose hands is My indignation,  
> I send it against a godless nation  
> And commission it against the people of My fury  
> To capture booty and to seize plunder,  
> And to trample them down like mud in the streets.  
> Yet it does not so intend,  
> Nor does it plan so in its heart,  
> But rather it is its purpose to destroy  
> And to cut off many nations.  

| Isaiah 10:5–7 |

Here God reveals that He is sending Assyria "the rod of His anger" against His people Israel, a "godless nation." God is specifically bringing this ravaging nation against Israel "to capture booty and to seize plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets." Obviously, this results in great suffering and distress among the rebellious Israelites. But, God is clear: the woe He is announcing is on the very instrument He is using to punish Israel! Assyria is not a willing party to the punishment of Israel: they do not intend to be involved in doing God's work, "but rather it is its purpose to destroy and to cut off many nations." Assyria had one purpose, God another, and all in the same historical events. While God says He is using Assyria, He likewise says...
He will punish them for their **intentions**. Note these words:

So it will be that when the Lord has completed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, He will say, "I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the pomp of his haughtiness." For he has said,

"By the power of my hand and by my wisdom I did this, For I have understanding; And I removed the boundaries of the peoples And plundered their treasures, And like a mighty man I brought down their inhabitants, And my hand reached to the riches of the peoples like a nest, And as one gathers abandoned eggs, I gathered all the earth; And there was not one that flapped its wing or opened its beak or chirped."

Is the axe to boast itself over the one who chops with it? Is the saw to exalt itself over the one who wields it? That would be like a club wielding those who lift it, Or like a rod lifting him who is not wood. Therefore the Lord, the GOD of hosts, will send a wasting disease among his stout warriors; And under his glory a fire will be kindled like a burning flame. And the light of Israel will become a fire and his Holy One a flame, And it will burn and devour his thorns and his briars in a single day.

| Isaiah 10:12–17 |

When God completes "His work" in Jerusalem He will punish the arrogance of the Assyrians. He points out the foolishness of the Assyrian thinking that he is operating separately from God's sovereign decree. This is the essence of the rhetorical questions concerning the axe, the saw, the club, and the rod: all instruments in the hand of another. Assyria has one purpose in heart: but it is God's purpose that prevails. Yet, God is perfectly just to judge on the basis of Assyria's **sinful intentions**. Assyria acts in accordance with its desires, and yet, what is done is the fulfillment of God's decree.

Joseph knew this truth as well. After the death of Jacob, Joseph's brothers were fearful of reprisals due to their treatment of Joseph years before. As they cowered before their powerful sibling, Joseph wept, realizing that his brothers still did not understand how he had forgiven them, nor how God had worked in the circumstances. So he says to them,

"Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

| Genesis 50:19–21 |

These are the words of one who has come to see the sovereign plan of God in his own life. Joseph well knew the motivations of his brothers when they sold him into slavery. But, in the very same event he saw the overriding hand of God, guiding, directing, and ultimately meaning in the **same action** to bring about good. One might ask, "But, if God decreed that this event would take place, how can He still hold Joseph's brothers personally accountable for their actions?" Even if we did not have an answer to this question, it would not matter: God makes it clear that He **does** hold men accountable. But it is clear that they are judged on the basis of the **intention**
of their hearts. We dare not think that Joseph’s brothers were forced against the desires of their hearts to commit the evil of selling their brother into slavery. They desired to do this: indeed, if God had not intervened it is sure they would have killed him outright, so great was their hatred toward their brother. But God preserved Joseph’s life, and sent him to Egypt to preserve life and accomplish His will.

But by far the greatest example of this is found in the pinnacle of God’s work of redemption, the cross of Jesus Christ. Surely no one can suggest that the cross was an afterthought, a desperate attempt to “fix” things after all had gone awry. Jesus taught His disciples that it was necessary that He go to Jerusalem and die. (Mark 8:31, Luke 9:22). The early church had the proper understanding of the relationship of God’s sovereign decree and the evil men showed in the act of nailing the sinless Son of God to a tree. As they prayed to God in the face of the persecution of the religious authorities, this truth came out with striking clarity:

"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 purpose predestined to occur. And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.”

| Acts 4:27–30 |

The Church prays to the Sovereign of the universe, the one who rules and reigns over all authorities, including those who were persecuting the Church. Just as Herod, and Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles and even the people of Israel had gathered against Christ, so too the early Church faced the wrath of the governing authorities. Yet, these Christians knew something that many today have forgotten: what took place at Calvary had been predestined by the sovereign decree of God. No human being had the power to raise a band against the Savior unless God so determined. But again, is it not true that what Herod and Pilate and the Jews and the Romans did was evil? Most assuredly. Man had never shown himself more evil than on Mount Calvary. Yet, what they did was predestined by God, and that to His glory. No event in history will bring more glory, honor and praise to God than the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ in the place of H s people. Yet again we find one single act, freely engaged in by evil men for evil motives, yet, at the same time, eternally predestined for good by God. The Potter is indeed free. He can, and does, decree whatsoever comes to pass, for His own glory (Ephesians 1: 11). And yet the Potter is the righteous judge of all the earth who always does right.

the vital conclusion

Salvation is of the Lord (Jonah 2:9). The most fundamental difference between the God-centered Gospel of the Apostles and of the Reformers and all other viewpoints is summed up in these few words.

Is salvation a work of God and man, a cooperative effort?

Is it something that God “sets up” like a cosmic multi-level marketing program where we “work the numbers” and gain eternal life as the final prize?
Is it a grand and beautiful design that simply awaits man’s turning of the key, so to speak, to work?

Is salvation of the Lord, of men, or a mixture of both?

Salvation is of the Lord. Does this simply mean that the plan comes from His hand, so that without Him, there would be no salvation? Is that all it means? The Apostle Paul did not view it that way:

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, “LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD.”

| Corinthians 1:26–31 |

No man can boast before God. God has chosen the weak things, the base things, the foolish things, so that He might destroy the wisdom of the wise. It is by "His doing" that any person is in Christ. It is not by His doing and our doing, a cooperative effort, but by His alone. Now, one might object to the use of the term "alone," but the passage bears this out. Christ has become to us everything we need: wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. None of this comes from ourselves. None of this is dependent upon us. The result, Paul says, is that if anyone is to boast, he can boast solely in the Lord.

The Christian heart is glad to confess, "Salvation is of the Lord." All of it. In completeness. In perfection. The God who decrees all things saves perfectly. Salvation is a divine act, a divine work. It is centered upon God, not upon man. It is God's glory, not man's, that Is at stake. The God-centeredness of the gospel is what makes the biblical teaching so fundamentally different than all the religions of men.

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