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Is Calvinism Biblical? (Part 1)



Is Calvinism Biblical? (Debate) - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg and Douglas Wilson engage in a discussion about the biblical basis of Calvinism. Wilson posits that God's decree creates freedom for humanity, which means that trivial choices have everlasting implications because of God's sovereignty. Meanwhile, Gregg argues that Calvinism lacks exegetical strength, and he questions if anyone can show a verse that teaches absolute divine determinism. Despite their differences, both agree that the Bible teaches that man has a choice.

Transcript

The opening statement begins with the affirmative, which goes to Mr. Wilson. Thank you. It is good to be here.

I'd like to thank Matt Gray and CRF for sponsoring this and doing the legwork. Thank Steve Gregg for coming up from Grangeville. Thank Roy Atwood for agreeing to moderate.

I'd like to also thank Pastor Kim Kirkland of New Life Bible Fellowship, whose idea this was in the first place, and for setting the ball in motion. But overarching all things, I'd like to thank God, who governs all things, and in whom we live and move and have our being. And of course, we're talking about what exactly that means, what is involved in that when we say we live and move and have our being in Him.

This first debate is on the sovereignty of God. And of course, every Christian says, well, how can Christians debate the sovereignty of God? Well, what we're debating is the definition of the word sovereignty, not the reality of sovereignty. Both I and my opponent would agree that God is sovereign over all things.

But where we differ is what is entailed in that sovereignty. In order to make clear what I'm arguing for, I want to maintain what I call the exhaustive sovereignty of God. That is, God is sovereign at the macro level, God is sovereign at the micro level.

Nothing happens outside of His all-determining decree. And this decree does not create a fatalistic machine that grinds us up like so much hamburger. This decree creates

freedom for us.

The more Shakespeare writes, the more sovereign he is and the freer Hamlet gets. Hamlet has freedom because Shakespeare writes. Hamlet's freedom is not displaced by Shakespeare's freedom.

It is created by Shakespeare's freedom. So I want to argue for the exhaustive sovereignty of God. And of course, in the mind of an Augustinian or a Calvinist, if you want to use the contemporary nickname, in the mind of a Calvinist, to say exhaustive sovereignty is like saying sovereign sovereignty.

We're just saying, well, sovereignty involves sovereignty in the details, sovereignty in the great things and sovereignty in the lesser things. So what I'm arguing for is exhaustive sovereignty. And I will let my opponent define his position, but his position is other than that.

He does not want to say that God is sovereign in every detail. He's sovereign overall, but he's not sovereign necessarily the way I am defining it in all, through all, throughout everything. When we first set this debate up, we had no idea that all of us here would still be reeling from the horrible events in New York and Washington, D.C. And we had no idea that we would have such a stark reminder of our own mortality and such a stark reminder of how great God is and how tiny we are in reference to his purposes and plans.

But this is a wonderful exhibition of the sovereignty that we all affirm at some level. These are not mere academic issues. These issues touch each of us every day at some level with every step we take, with every head check in the car, every plane we get on, get off of.

We can see how a number of these people, the death toll is over 6,000 now in New York. Every person who died in that tower made a series of trivial choices throughout the earlier part of that day. And all those trivial choices, no, I think I'll go here first and then go to the sandwich shop.

I think I'll do this and not that. All of those trivial choices were eternal choices, everlasting choices. There's no such thing, I think we can see, as a small decision by a human being.

There's no such thing as a trivial move. These are not academic issues. These are not arcane theological debates best tucked away in some book of theology in the times of the Reformation.

This affects everyone. It affects how we live our lives. It affects how we trust God.

It affects how we pray. It affects how we respond to hard mercies. I first started

grappling with these truths on a personal level.

I engaged with them on an intellectual level or a theological level in other settings. But I first started grappling with these issues, or it might be better to say they started grappling with me, as a result of an automobile accident. It didn't involve me or my family, but it almost involved me and my family.

We were traveling on the East Coast, and we decided to drive from Annapolis, Maryland, into D.C. to go to the Smithsonian. We borrowed a little crumple car, the kind that wouldn't take much. We were driving into D.C. on Highway 50, and it started to rain, and it got really nasty.

Suddenly, this big car came across the middle strip from the other side of the highway. She'd come on the on-ramp and lost control. I swerved and missed her by inches, a foot maybe, but just barely missed her.

She swerved around, and the car behind us t-boned her car, and she was killed. I started thinking about how many life-and-death choices I had been making in the ten minutes prior to that. We have a tendency to say, well, you should really, really pray if you're going to ask a girl to marry you, or you should really pray and get God's guidance if you're going to move to another state and change jobs and so forth.

It's true, we should pray, because those are big decisions, but those are big decisions from our vantage point. It was born in on me with startling clarity that I hadn't made a small decision that entire day. Moreover, I hadn't made a small decision in my life.

Every time I tapped on the brakes, every time I flipped the turn signal, every time I did a head check, every time I did these things, it was affecting what was going to happen down the road. If I'd been five seconds faster, we may have heard sirens. If I'd been ten seconds slower, we would have been in a traffic jam.

And if I'd been one second slower, we'd have all been dead. Not only would we have all been dead, but my grandchildren wouldn't have been here, and their children wouldn't be here, and their children wouldn't be here, and all the tens of thousands of descendants that I hope God gives me over the next millennium or so, none of them would be here. And all of it was riding on my lane change.

And I didn't have time to seek the will of God before I changed lanes, or moved here, or moved there. Well, the Scripture says in Proverbs 16.33, the lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord. In Proverbs 16.1, it says the preparations of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord.

The Bible tells us that every step, what's more random than the casting of lots? What's more random than throwing of dice? What's more random than just walking aimlessly down a sidewalk, or driving aimlessly down the road? Well, every bit of that is in the

hand of God. I also have to confess, connected to this, that, and I'm not speaking for others, I'm not speaking here for every Arminian in the world, but I have to confess that before I came to grasp these truths, before I embraced them, I have to confess that I was deeply prejudiced against them. I also remember standing at one point in my living room and surrendering to God on the point.

The opening prayer I thought was appropriate and one that we should all affirm, and I think we do all affirm in principle, but I can assure you that there was a point in my life where I didn't affirm it. I would affirm it on paper, but I didn't want these truths to be true. I was not willing for them to be true.

And I remember having to surrender to God on the point. I did not become a Calvinist at that point. When I surrendered, I didn't become a Calvinist, but I became willing to become one.

And prior to that time, I was not willing at all. And this is the demeanor that we should all have here tonight and in the debates tomorrow. Each of us, and I would include myself here, each of us should be willing to change, abandon the position that we believe to be the truth of God when someone shows us from the word of God that it's not the case, that you've misread the scripture, thinking you understood it, but you did not.

All of us need to be prepared to submit to whatever the scriptures teach. So, what is at stake in this debate? God is God over all things, through all things, and in all things. He is God over how many hairs came out of my head this morning in my brush.

And when Jesus says that the hairs of your head are all numbered, don't be afraid. When Jesus says in the same breath that a sparrow can't fall to the ground apart from the will of the Father. You can look out in the neighbor's yard and you can see a cat stalking a bird.

You don't have to say, you know, if that's a sparrow, that's in the Father. But if it's a robin, he better watch out for himself. Because Jesus is using a figure of speech that invites us to spread the truth into the corners.

He is not saying the hairs of your head are numbered, but the hairs on your chin aren't. Or the hairs of your head are numbered, but the hairs on your arm are. Gosh, I don't know how many there are.

When Jesus uses that expression, he is inviting us to say the hairs of your head are numbered. The hairs on your arm are numbered. God knows how many little bits of gravel are in your driveway.

He knows the number of hairs on the last yellow dog in the history of the world. He knows everything. And moreover, he knows it with these details being dependent upon antecedent events that are also within his sovereignty.

So when we say, when we as Calvinists maintain that God is sovereign over all things, it's because, it's not that we believe that God is a sovereign control freak and God cannot afford to let anybody else do anything or know anything. It's that we believe that his relationship to us is like Shakespeare's relationship to the characters in his play. His relationship to us is not like one of the characters in relation to the other character.

And this is where we stumble. We stumble because we assume that God's will toward us is the same as my will toward another. If I push someone or if I offend someone or if I take someone's life or sin against them in some way, as was just recently done on this grand scale, the exercise of will on the part of the terrorists displaced other wills.

In other words, creaturely wills, created wills, are like billiard balls. One displaces another. If one billiard ball comes and occupies this place, then the other one has to move.

And so when we act on one another, we act on one another by displacing one another's wills. When we act on one another the way we would describe it as coercively. When we do that, we move someone else's will out of the way.

But God's will is not like that. It doesn't make sense to say, now in this scene in Hamlet, how much of this is Shakespeare and how much of this is Hamlet? That's a nonsensical question. If two men are carrying a log, it makes sense to say, well, how much of the weight was borne by this guy and how much of the weight was borne by that guy? That's a physics problem.

But when we're talking about the relationship of God to man, it doesn't make sense to say, well, Shakespeare did 70% of that and Hamlet did 30. It doesn't make sense to go with the hyper-Calvinist and say Shakespeare wrote it all and Hamlet's a bunch of nothing. It doesn't make sense to adopt the Pelagian view that says Hamlet, or the atheistic materialist view that Hamlet created himself.

Hamlet writes his own play. That doesn't make sense either. I believe that we ought to maintain that Shakespeare does 100% and Hamlet does 100%.

And the more Shakespeare does, the more Hamlet does. The more God writes my life for me, the more life I have to make choices in to serve him and respond to him and love him. So we are saying that God is God over all things, including the hairs of our head, including the pebbles in our driveway, including the grains of sand on the seashore and so forth.

Our lives are lived along a razor edge. Our lives are lived along a razor edge because God has put eternity in our hearts. Every decision we make, scratching your head, stopping for a drink at the drinking fountain, everything that you do has to be governed by God.

We walk along a razor's edge and there's eternity on this side and there's eternity on that side. And we need the everlasting arms underneath and God's protective hands around us in every detail because there's no such thing as a trivial decision. There's no such thing as a trivial act.

We're created in the image of God and so consequently everything we do is filled with moment. Everything we do is filled with importance. Now, I've I've said a lot by way of autobiographical information and definition, and I want to say a few things about what the scripture actually says.

In Isaiah 46 verses nine and ten, it says, Remember the former things of old, for I am God and there is no other. I am God and there's none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times, things that are not yet done, saying my counsel shall stand and I will do all my pleasure. So, of course, we would both agree that God will do all that he wants to do.

But I believe that is saying more than this. Not only will God do all that he wants to do, but he declares the end from the beginning. So when God creates the world, knowing the end from the beginning and declaring that he's going to accomplish all his good purpose in it, then we know that when God creates the world, the world that comes into being is the world that God wanted to be here.

And this means that fundamentally, I want to argue that, you know, a lot of lots of folks won't appreciate this, but I believe that every Christian who affirms creatio ex nihilo, creation from nothing. I want to, in overflow of benevolence, declare them all honorary Calvinists. Every Christian who believes that God created from nothing, believes that the world is here because God put it here and he put it here because he wants it here.

And he wants it here this way. We can debate what his reasons are for wanting it here, but he put it here because he wanted it here. And he put it here knowing what would come if he did it.

He knows the end from the beginning in Psalm 139, verse 16. We don't have to we don't have to rest on speculation from a text like Isaiah. Isaiah, excuse me, Psalm 139, verse 16, says, Your eyes saw my substance being yet unformed.

And in your book, they all were written. The days fashioned for me when as yet there were none of them. God wrote my biography before I was born in God's book.

They were all written. The days fashioned for me. Well, the days fashioned for me were not fashioned by me.

The days fashioned for me were fashioned by God and written his written in his book. Isaiah, 45, 7. I form the light and create darkness. I make peace and create calamity.

I, the Lord, do all these things. Now, this is where we start to stick a little bit because we really want God to be a scripture, describes him kind and benevolent and so forth. And he is.

But he's not benevolent the same way that we are. Because his action is is does not displace my responsibility the way my action on someone else would do. So God can create evil, create evil in the sense of calamity.

God can create evil. The evil day and scripture says that he does. He creates darkness.

He creates light. He makes peace and he creates calamity. I say Amos, three, six says this, and it shows the sovereignty of God, not just the sovereignty of God over nice things, not just the sovereignty of God over sweet things.

Many, many Christians love to give glory to God when if it involves baskets of kittens or pussy willows or nice things. But we have trouble with earthquakes and we have trouble with disasters or this enormous calamity in New York City. We say, what's God doing? And we struggle with that because we don't know.

We don't affirm with the scriptures that God has authority over this. He has sovereignty over this, over the free choices of men, as I've already described, and over the wicked free choices of men. In Amos, three, six, it says, if a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people be afraid if there's calamity in a city? Will not the Lord have done it? And that's this is something we need to just submit to.

If there's calamity in a city, in this case, New York City, will not the Lord have done it? This does not mean that the terrorists are not wicked men. They are wicked men and they're not puppets. But God is in all over all and through all.

And there's not a hair on anyone's head in that tower that perished apart from the will of the father. And this create this is a wonderful source of two C's, courage and comfort. There's a purpose in everything.

God has a divine purpose in all things. And we can take courage in that and we can take comfort from that. I want to begin by saying the admiration I have for Douglas Wilson and his wife, whom I only recently met.

But I had read some of their writings over the years. I especially like their writings about family life. And I was drawn to Douglas personally by reading his books.

I knew we did not agree on this issue. But notwithstanding the difference we have on the matter of Calvinism, I was thinking of the many things that Douglas and I actually have had in common. We both were born the same year.

I realize he looks 10 years younger than I do. I assume that's due to clean living. We

were both raised in Baptist homes.

And both of us began. Well, we preached our first sermons when we were teenagers. Both of us played in Christian bands and have written music.

About the same time in our lives, actually, we didn't know each other, of course. Eventually, we both went into full time ministry, though neither of us chose to go the route of formal theological training. Both of us are we're studious and studied on our own.

And I know he he got a formal education in philosophy, wasn't it? I did not. But we did depart from our Baptist roots theologically on in some ways. Both of us actually went in the direction of reformed theology with reference to our eschatology.

He became a post millennialist. I became an amillennialist. Both are reformed views.

But we went different directions for some reason on the matter of soteriology, the doctrines of salvation, the doctrines of grace. That's something I have not understood very well, why people go that direction. But then some of the people here don't know why I didn't go that direction.

On my radio talk show, I had a Calvinist pastor call frequently and say, Steve, you're you're an odd bird. He says, you left dispensationalism to become reformed in your eschatology. But why didn't you embrace Calvinism, too? My answer is because I left dispensationalism when I found out it was a manmade system.

I did not wish to choose another manmade system. And that is why I believe Calvinism is. That's why it took the church 400 years to come up with it.

The Calvinistic doctrine of sovereignty is not the doctrine. My contention is not the doctrine of sovereignty found in the Bible. And it is not the doctrine that anyone who is a Christian found in the Bible until Augustine around the year 400.

Calvinist scholars admit this without any embarrassment. They usually say, well, the church was persecuted during those early years. They didn't really have time to think through some of these theological issues until Augustine's time.

Well, 400 years is a long time for the church to think through issues. It seems to me like during times of persecution are the times when the issues like sovereignty are particularly under scrutiny. I believe that's the case in the book of Revelation written to churches that were under persecution, a book that presents the sovereignty of God about as strongly as any book in the Bible.

I do believe that times of persecution are the times when sovereignty of God is the most important issue to Christians. And it's interesting that during the years that the church

was persecuted, it never occurred to them that the Calvinistic or Augustinian view of sovereignty was found in the Bible. Augustine brought it in, as most are willing to admit, from his own mixture of his own philosophical background.

He had been a Manichean, but most would not admit that he brought Manicheanism into his theology. Although it's interesting that the Calvinistic doctrine of sovereignty or the Augustinian view is agreeable with Manicheanism. And although none of the church fathers before the year 400 ever heard of Augustine, well, maybe a little before 400 they did, they did recognize in the doctrine of total determinism Manicheanism.

Or they often had a hard time finding the difference between that doctrine and the pagan view of fate. In fact, I have quotes from about a dozen of the church fathers who talk about what we call Calvinistic view of sovereignty. They didn't call it that, of course.

And they call it indistinguishable from the pagan view of fate. They call it indistinguishable from Manicheanism. Some of the better refutations of Augustine's doctrine came before Augustine was around by Christian fathers writing against Manny, the founder of Manicheanism.

I suspect, though I couldn't prove it, that Augustine probably had a tinge of his old Manicheanism ideas about sovereignty that came with him. Most of us bring some baggage into our Christian lives. I suspect that that may have been the case because he introduced for the first time the view of sovereignty that God is all determining.

Now, Christians all believe, as Douglas correctly said, in the sovereignty of God. I would even say that all Christians believe in the exhaustive sovereignty of God. But the definition of the word sovereignty is where we do not agree.

I have a quote from R.C. Sproul. In his book, Chosen by God, he defines sovereignty this way. He said, when we speak of divine sovereignty, we are speaking about God's authority and about God's power.

Well, if that's really what Calvinists mean by sovereignty, then all Armenians would agree with them and all Christians who ever lived would agree with them. If someone said, does God have all sovereignty? And what we mean is all authority and all power. Those are the two things Sproul said actually constitute the doctrine of sovereignty.

I've never met a Christian in my life who doesn't believe that God has all authority or who doesn't believe that God has all power. Those are basic doctrines that Armenians can embrace, too. There's another element, though, and this is what not all Christians will embrace, and it is what Augustine introduced.

And that is in the same statement. R.C. Sproul continues. He says that God, in some sense, for ordains whatever comes to pass is a necessary result of his sovereignty, that

God somehow for ordains.

Everything that comes to pass is a necessary element of his sovereignty. Why should we believe this? Because Mr. Sproul says so, because Augustine says so. It certainly doesn't agree with the dictionary definition of the word sovereignty.

I encourage you to look it up. If you look in the dictionary, you'll find the word sovereign means a king or a monarch. It means one who has the highest rank and authority.

It refers to a person who makes his decisions without being answerable to any other person. That's what the word sovereignty means. None of those things speak of absolute divine determinism because kings are sovereigns, but they don't determine everything that goes on in their realm.

Do they? I've never known of a king that did. Now, some might say, well, kings don't have omniscience and omnipotence like God does. And that's why God's sovereignty extends further.

I'm not so sure that that's a good answer. That suggests that the only reason that all monarchs are not tyrants is because they have human limitations. And were they given the power to be tyrants, that's what they would do.

They would determine every thought, word and deed of all their subjects. And since God has that power, that's what he does. But you see, when we talk about divine determinism, which is what Calvinism really means by sovereignty.

We're really not talking about what the word sovereignty means at all. Because a father is sovereign in his home, a husband over his wife, a lord over his servants, a king over his subjects. These are all sovereign positions, but none of them determine every thought, word or deed of those who are subject to them.

There is no support from the dictionary and there can't be from the Bible since the Bible doesn't even use the word sovereign. But when we say the sovereignty of God, if we use the word in its ordinary meaning, we mean that God has all authority. He can act unilaterally anytime he wishes to.

He answers to none. And he has enough power to retain his rights and to defend his rights. But that word sovereignty does not tell us whether he determines everything or not, because that's not part of the word sovereignty and it's not part of the teaching of Scripture about God.

There is no place in the Bible that substitutes the concept of divine determinism for the concept of God's sovereignty as a king. In fact, since the word sovereignty doesn't appear in the Bible, we have to derive it from the Bible from the ways that the Bible describes God as a sovereign. God is called a king.

God is called a lord. God is called a husband. He is called a father.

All of these are terms that convey the idea of sovereignty, but none of them convey the idea of total determinism because that's not part of what sovereignty means. That is the problem with Calvinism. They think, in many cases, that they are the ones who have the exhaustive view of sovereignty, where everybody who believes that God has total authority over all things believes in exhaustive sovereignty.

And I believe that. What non-Calvinists do not believe is that the Bible teaches that God determines everything that happens. Now, non-Calvinists do not put God outside his universe to suggest that God determines how many of my hairs fall out today or how many sparrows fall to the ground is not a problem to the Arminian.

And I use the word Arminian only as a catch word for non-Calvinists. I don't know if I'm an Arminian because I've never read Arminius. But I would say this.

I'm not a Calvinist, and that makes me an Arminian in the eyes of all Calvinists. So an Arminian has no difficulty at all with the view that God knows the number of hairs on our head, that God orders many things in history to bring about results that he wants. Virtually every affirmative statement that a Calvinist can say about God's sovereignty, an Arminian would say without any hesitation except that the Arminian does not extend the concept of sovereignty to total determinism.

There's no need to do that. No scripture teaches it. The question we're discussing is, is the Calvinist view of sovereignty biblical? I've read two books.

Douglas Wilson has written on this. In those books, there are, I would say, in the book *Easy Chairs, Hard Words*, I didn't count them, but I copied out every scripture that was in that book. And there's long lists here.

I would suggest, I don't know if you can, probably 150 scriptures in that and on the different points of Calvinism. I don't know the total number. I'm estimating about 150 scriptures.

I not only looked them all up, I printed them all out. I have them all in my notes here in their entirety. One thing I find interesting about them is not one of the verses teaches absolute divine determinism.

And not one of those verses embarrasses an Arminian. Now, here's the thing. I was given just yesterday.

I don't know who did it. Someone sent it to me. Sent me a printed debate between a Calvinist and Arminian, I guess, to help me prepare for this.

I only read a little bit and didn't have time to read the rest. But the Calvinist was James

White. And he started out saying that Calvinism strength is that it is an exegetical position.

Now, exegetical means you use sound methods of interpretation to look at a passage script and draw from it the meaning from its context and from the language and so forth of what it really means. And as I read that, I thought that is a very strange thing to say that Calvinism is an exegetical position. I don't know very much about philosophy, but exegesis is all I do.

For 30 years that I've been in this room, I've taught through the Bible 16 times, verse by verse. I don't do it. I don't do anything excellently.

But the thing I do better than most things is exegesis. I mean, that's that's what I do. And I've never found any exegetical reason to support the Calvinist doctrines or their interpretations of these scriptures.

When they say, you know, all that were appointed to eternal life believed in Acts, chapter 13. Or when they say, Jacob, I have loved. Esau, I've hated.

I find that Calvinists don't exegete these passages really at all. They follow more of a procedure of see there. That's that's their approach to see there.

See there. See there. That verse sounds like it could support a Calvinist idea.

Yes, it sounds like that until you exegete it. Exegeting it means you look at the context. You follow the train of thought of the writer.

And when you do that, you never find to my mind, of course, people far more intelligent than I am are Calvinist. And so obviously some have better minds and may do exegesis better than I do. But the Calvinist writers I've read, they're not exegetical.

Exegesis seems to be the weakness of these writers, because as I say, they find a verse. They will see this verse proves it. It's a proof texting system.

And I look up the verse. I say, why do they think it says that? Why don't they look at the context? Now, I will say this. The appeal of Calvinism is its internal consistency logically.

And everybody who's a Calvinist revels in this. And rightly so. It's a very self-consistent logical system.

The problem is that a self-consistent logical system will not reach the truth if the premise you start with is wrong. And the premise that it starts with is divine determinism, which is not taught in the Bible. And I'm eager to find anyone who can show me a verse that teaches absolute divine determinism.

The verses that Douglas has shared tell us a great deal about God determining many

things. But the real question is, does God determine the free choices of men? Calvinism teaches that he does. Now, he does this somehow without removing man's responsibility for his choices.

God determines who will be saved and who will be lost. God determines whether I will sin today or whether I'll not sin today. By the way, in Douglas's books, as well as in all Calvinist books I've read, Calvinists are at pains to deny that God is the author of sin.

But Shakespeare is the author of Hamlet's sins. And if God is the author of history in the same way that Shakespeare, or even in a similar way, or an analogous way, or even not a very similar way, if God is writing the book and we're just living out the book, and he's the author of the book, but he's not the author of sin, I'd say God must have had a co-author. And that co-author must have written a significant percentage of the book.

All of it that has to do with man's sin. So the Bible teaches God does have a co-author. God determines what he determines to determine.

And he chooses not to determine things that he chooses not to determine. Those he left to a creature that he made different from all other creatures. Every molecule in the universe obeys God.

Every bird, every flower, every planet, of course, obeys God. But God complains that people don't always obey him. He says the ox knows its master, the ass knows its master's crib, but my people Israel, they don't know me.

They don't understand. Isaiah said that in chapter one. Jeremiah over in chapter seven said the stork knows its appointed times, and the birds, you know, they migrate properly, but my people Israel, they don't go the right way.

What's going on here? And every time God complains about what people are doing, God is in a sense communicating something to us, saying, I didn't do this. I didn't choose this. And not only does he do it through every complaint, but he says it in some very plain statements.

Jeremiah 19, 5. And he says the same thing again in Jeremiah 32, 35. They have built also the high places of Baal to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command. It's not in some eternal decree of God.

He didn't command it. He didn't decree it, nor did I speak it, nor did it come to my mind. In Isaiah 66, verses three and four, God says this.

They have chosen their own ways and their soul delights in their abominations. I also will choose their delusions and I will bring their fears upon them, because when I called, none did answer. When I spoke, they did not hear, but they did evil before my eyes and chose that in which I did not delight.

They chose that which God didn't delight in. Actually, Calvin said that everything we do, God preordained out of the good pleasure of his will. Even the lost are foreordained for destruction out of the good pleasure of his will, even though God disagrees and says in Ezekiel 33, 11, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked man turns from his evil and lives.

Turn you, turn you at my reproof, for why will you die? God does not take responsibility for the rebellion and the sin of man. He does take responsibility for the consequences. Man chooses his way.

God chooses his delusions. God is still sovereign. For me to allow my children to choose where they'll go to school or who they will marry does not mean I'm not a sovereign father.

I can give them as many choices I want to. It doesn't challenge my sovereignty. It's just about my style of governing.

God can be absolutely sovereign and still give some creatures the freedom to choose many things without his determining it. And he doesn't surrender his sovereignty. All he surrenders is the doctrine of divine determinationism, which is not anything to.

It's no tragedy to sacrifice that since the Bible doesn't teach it. That is my view. Now, I admit.

My opponent is probably a far more intelligent man than I am, and many of the Calvinist writers I've read are more intelligent. And that is very impressive. Sometimes somebody asked me tonight.

You know, what do you do as an Armenian realizing that Arminianism hasn't had any champions since the time of Augustine? I say, well, Augustinism didn't have any champions before the time of Augustine. And the guys who were within a generation or two of the apostles somehow dropped the ball. If the apostles taught this divine determinism within a generation, all the Christians lost the doctrine.

It just disappeared. And whenever they heard it, they thought it was part of manichaeism or paganism. Interesting.

And then Augustine comes along and he mixes neopaganism. I should say neoplatonism. That's paganism, too, with Christianity and becomes the most influential theologian in history.

Even more influential than Paul, since more people believe what Augustine said than what Paul said. But the fact is, it's a man-made doctrine. And I left dispensationalism because it was a man-made doctrine.

I did not join the Calvinist ranks because I didn't want to just exchange one man-made doctrine for another. And so if anyone wonders, why didn't you become a Calvin? That's why. I am a person concerned about exegesis, and I will be glad to execute any scripture any Calvinist wants to present.

And I'd be glad to show that from context, the Calvinist exegesis is inferior to the historic Christian exegesis. And so my contention is the Calvinist doctrine of divine sovereignty is not biblical. But the biblical doctrine of divine sovereignty certainly is.

Thank you. We now go to the ten-minute responses, beginning with Mr. Wilson. In this response time, I'm going to try and talk fast.

Me too. First, I thought that Steve was going to be nice to me by attributing our parents to my clean living, but then he brought up my philosophy degree. Everyone has skeletons.

Everyone has skeletons. I want to point out some things that are of minor importance and other things that are significant. First, when he says it took the church 400 years to come up with these truths, I want you to notice the begging of the question.

Of course, if we are debating something that was simply fought over by theologians in the course of church history, that's a legitimate question. But what we're actually talking about is what the scripture says. And we could say it took the church 300 years to come up with the deity of Christ.

Well, no, not exactly. That's when it was defined at the Council of Nicaea. That's when it got tidied up.

But we believe it because the scripture teaches it. So there's a begging of the question when we talk about how long it took the church to come up with it as opposed to how long it took the church. And it took quite a bit of doing to shake it off.

I would commend a biography of Augustine by Peter Brown. Anyone who reads carefully through his life will see how Augustine is progressively ditching the Hellenism and the Platonism that he tracked into the church with him. And the Pelagian controversy in which he articulates these great truths is at the end of his life, near the end of his life.

So Augustine, I think you'd have a difficult time laying the charge of a Manichean influence at the doorstep of Calvinism or Augustinianism. All authority and power, Steve defines sovereignty as the possession of all authority and power. And then says he departs from the extension that says that in some sense everything is foreordained.

Well, we both agree that God is king. But we're maintaining, the Calvinists are maintaining that God is the king of all the hairs of my head. And God is the king of every detail all day long throughout the course of my life.

And this has ramifications, for example, to whether the head that the hairs are on is living or dead. How it's doing, what I'm doing, the choices I make that determine whether or not I'm going to be alive or dead. These questions cannot be separated from one another.

Of course, earthly kings, fathers, authorities are not exhaustively sovereign. I would point back to the billiard ball example. There's no way that a creature can exercise complete God-like sovereignty over another creature without becoming a tyrant.

If one creature exercises what I'm calling exhaustive sovereignty over another creature, that would be tyranny indeed. But God's relationship in this respect is not like our relationship to one another. The thing that's tripping Steve up is he says it's inappropriate to extend the concept of God's sovereignty out into complete and total determinism.

Well, of course, it's inappropriate. I agree it's inappropriate. That's why we don't do it.

That's why Calvinists aren't what we call determinists. Since he brought up the skeleton in my clause, the philosophy degree, I did my master's thesis on determinism and free will before I was reformed, before I was a Calvinist. I wrote against every form of fatalism and behavioral determinism and so forth.

And that determinism that I wrote against then, I would write against and stand against now, today, for the same reasons. Calvinism is not fatalism. Calvinism is not a blind determinism.

So when he says not one verse teaches determinism, well, I agree with that. Not one verse teaches determinism. But Calvinism is not determinism.

Calvinism, one part of Calvinism, affirms that God controls everything. God, as the Westminster Confession says, God freely and unalterably ordains whatsoever comes to pass. And everybody goes, ah, determinism.

But you say, wait, wait. Yet, so that he's not the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the liberty or contingency of secondary causes. So biblical Calvinism, the reformed faith, emphatically rejects what philosophers would identify as determinism.

And if you can take one portion of it out and make that deterministic, but that's not what it is. So I would submit that to attack Calvinism for being deterministic is to misunderstand an important aspect of Calvinism. So we do affirm that God decrees all things.

We also affirm that this does not make us puppets. It does not displace our liberty or contingency. It doesn't crowd us.

It doesn't exercise any tyrannical influence over us. It's not deterministic. Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

Where the spirit of the Lord comes, God sets us free. And the reformed faith embraces that and affirms that. Now, with regard to the history of exegesis, one of the things that's, I think, important to note here is that in the history of the church, it was the reformed fathers, the fathers of the Reformation, who recovered exegesis.

When you say the word exegesis and you think of it in the modern sense of unpacking the meaning of the text, this was precisely the thing that the Reformation fathers, John Calvin in particular, recovered. If you look at Calvin's commentaries on scripture, he goes through the scripture verse by verse, and his interest is fundamentally, profoundly exegetical. Well, Steve asks, well, if he does exegesis and he does exegesis all the time, why does he never see what we say the text sees? He says that Calvinists keep pointing to texts and heaps up a big pile of them and says, see, see, look at these texts.

And he wants to know, how come I've gone through these texts and I don't see what they're looking at? I don't see what they're pointing at. They say, look, look, and I look at it and I don't see. Well, I would submit that the reason is found.

I'm not sure if you have one of these back there, but on Steve's table, if he doesn't have it here, I'm sure you can get one from him. In the beginning of this booklet, he has rules of reasoning from the scriptures and there are seven of them. And the first six, I would have to say, are glorious.

They're not just good. They're glorious. Right.

The first six are wonderful. But then in the seventh, he opens the door in the back of the citadel and a lot of bad troops can come through that open gate. In this seventh rule for the exegesis of scripture, this is one of the rules for exegesis that Steve gives.

He says, the burden of proof usually falls more heavily upon one side of an argument than upon the other. It rests predominantly upon the side that is challenging what common sense, conventional wisdom or plain initial evidence would ordinarily suggest. I want you to notice the authority that's being appealed to here.

Common sense, conventional wisdom and plain initial evidence. In other words, what I think what I thought initially was the case. Common sense.

What I thought was the case. He goes on, for example, of common sense or plain evidence suggests that a God who did not control all human decisions could not be God. Then the burden of proof would fall upon the non-Calvinist debater to show convincingly that God could still be God while deferring to man's free choice.

On the other hand, if conventional wisdom and common sense suggest that God could

not inevitably ordain sin without becoming the responsible party for sin. And he goes on. My issue here is not to engage with his particular argument, but to point out the authority that he's appealing to.

There are two authorities. One is common sense, conventional wisdom. What my initial reaction is.

Well, if God ordains all things, that makes me a puppet. Well, that's what common sense tells him. Frankly, that's what common sense tells me, too.

Common sense tells me the same thing. But my authority is not common sense. My authority is scripture.

There's one role that reason has. And the authority of reason is not to tell me what scripture cannot be saying or what scripture has to be trying to tell me. The role of reason is simply this, to unpack the text.

What does the text say? And I don't have the authority to say, well, it can't be saying that because that would collide with common sense. There's something else, but I'll have to get to it later. OK, thank you.

Ten minutes. All right. Thank you, Douglas.

In Douglas's presentation, he didn't say enough things I disagreed with to take me much time with it because he, of course, argued for the sovereignty of God in many of the terms that I do. But where I disagree, as I've already mentioned, is in the likening of God's sovereignty or God's control over the universe with that of Shakespeare over Hamlet or for that matter, any author over any play or novel. This I do not find to be a biblical analogy.

And as I said, if it is true, which the Bible doesn't declare it to be, thank God it doesn't. It would make God the author of sin since many of the chapters of this book are full of sin. And if God is the author of it all, then he's the author of sin as well.

There's no getting around this. I do know the difference between determinism as philosophers talk about it, which suggests that all actions and choices are determined by previous actions and choices. And I was not accusing Calvinists of believing that doctrine.

That is why I chose my words better. I use the term divine determinism. I did not talk about determinism because that's a philosophical category that I don't believe Calvinists believe in.

And Douglas has said he does not. But I do not see how a person can teach that God wrote our lives the way Shakespeare wrote Hamlet and can object to my calling that

divine determinism, since everything Hamlet did was determined by one mind and one will. And that's Mr. Shakespeare's, not Hamlet's.

Now, my suggestion is that Hamlet and Shakespeare are not a good analogy. And for a number of reasons, the first one is the Bible doesn't say that that would be a good analogy in my judgment. But I do want to talk about the rules of reasoning from Scripture, if I could, because Douglas liked my first six.

The seventh one he didn't like because I mentioned logic in his book. Easy chairs, hard words. He referred to logic as carnal reasoning.

Yes, he referred to logic as carnal reasoning. Now, I must say that his. His character in that book, who represents the Calvinist view, has to admit, as Calvinist frequently do, it's a mystery, it's a mystery, it's a mystery, it's a mystery.

What is a mystery? Well, how God can determine that I would sin inevitably and unchangeably. And yet he doesn't interfere with my free will. What? How's that work? Well, it's a mystery.

Well, I'll tell you what I do believe in mysteries. I believe in the Trinity, for example. You can breathe a sigh of relief.

I believe the Trinity is a mystery. But the reason I believe it is to the Bible teaches it. I believe that and I believe that we arrive at the tree, not from some one text of Scripture, but from a reasonable.

Consolidation of all that the text says about the being of God, which leads us to conclude through the normal processes of reasoning. That these passages taken together must teach a Trinitarian doctrine. What we don't find is a parallel in this realm.

We don't find anything in the Bible that says if God determines everything, man is still free and responsible. It does go against our common sense. And thank God, there's nothing in the Bible that causes us to believe that.

Now, I do know that God uses the evil choices of men. Everyone knows that. Joseph's brothers, a pilot and Caiaphas and all those people who did all those nasty things were used of God to carry out God's purposes.

But the answer to that is actually found in a in a text that Douglas quoted earlier this evening. Proverbs 16, one, the preparations of the heart belong to man. But the answer of the tongue is from the Lord.

What that means is man makes his own decisions. He prepares his own heart. But God determines the outcome.

Now, Joseph's brothers tried, wanted to kill Joseph. But God didn't let that happen. It

wouldn't have suited God's purposes.

God didn't create in them the desire to kill Joseph. In fact, God thwarted that desire. Nor did he create in them the desire to do away with him another way.

But God permitted them. Same thing with Caiaphas. There's no reason to believe that God created in Caiaphas or Judas or any of those people their evil intentions.

The preparations of the heart belong to man. That's very contrary. Calvinism says, no, the preparations of the heart, that's God's doing.

But the Bible says, no, that's man's domain. The preparations of the heart belong to man. But the outcome is of the Lord.

In the same chapter, Proverbs says the same thing another way. It says in verse 9, Proverbs 16, 9, a man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps. I can sit here and plan to go back to my motel room after this.

But God will determine whether I get there safely or not because God determines the outcome. God determines the other factors. He doesn't determine what I will decide.

And he doesn't determine what I will decide if I want to crucify Christ or if I want to fall at his feet and embrace Christ. That, if he did, would leave no responsibility with me. Now, I know that sounds like carnal reasoning, but it's the only kind of reasoning there is.

The only alternative is desperate non-reasoning. Because there's nothing in the Bible that says that God determines something and holds man accountable for God determined. God continually argues that he did not determine these things.

Cain is a perfect example. The New Testament tells us that Cain was a child of the devil. It says that in 1 John chapter 3. Hey, he wasn't elect, right? But in Genesis chapter 4, when Cain is cast down because God did not accept his offering, what did God say to Cain? He said, Cain, why are you cast down? Why is your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not also be accepted? That's an interesting question.

It's rhetorical, of course. It means if you do well like Abel did, you will be accepted like Abel did. Now, if God had predestined Cain to be a child of the devil.

And God had predestined that Cain would kill his brother and take his place, then God was just playing games. He played games such as most monarchs wouldn't lower themselves to play. But to determine this man is going to be executed, but go and talk to him like he's got a free will to change his way when he doesn't.

I'm going to let you go. I'll turn my back and you can run the other direction. Then I'm going to shoot him in the back.

That's not a very nice way to go. If God had predestined Cain to be lost and gave him no freedom of will, but God foreordained and determined that unchangeably, as the Westminster Confession of Faith, as all Calvinists who are fair to their view believe, well, then God was lying when he suggested to Cain, you know, if you just do the same thing your brother did, you'll get the same approval from me that he got. And that's how God talks to people all the time.

All the time. He suggests you'll be rewarded if you make the right choice. Those that honor me, I will honor.

Conditional, isn't it? Those who believe shall be saved. Conditional. Man is given those choices.

God, in his sovereignty, has not chosen to interfere in those areas completely. God does act upon us. There's no question.

But in the final analysis, I believe the Bible teaches that the choice is man's. It's not God's. And many times God is very upset with the choices man makes.

Hardly a reasonable thing for God to do if he foreordained them all. Thank you. Thank you.