

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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The Sovereignty of God

Gordon H. Clark

Many of the matters discussed in the earlier sections—the Covenants, the Incarnation, the Satisfaction, and indeed Absolute Necessity—come to a head under the rubric of sovereignty. One question previously raised was whether God could have sovereignly dispensed with justice. The two Hodges decide in favor of justice and reject sovereignty. Let the reader understand that this treatise maintains that Christ satisfied the justice of his Father. What the treatise aims to show is that the Hodges and others have formulated an incorrect disjunction between the two. Or, to anticipate, justice is itself based on sovereignty. This includes the idea that the atonement was absolutely necessary. The theology of Charles Hodge is impeccable on nearly every point, yet some of his paragraphs (as I have indicated in other publications) suffer from confusion.

The question, "How is justice related to sovereignty?" can arise only within the sphere of Calvinism. Lutheran theology is more anthropocentric than theocentric. Krauth, an influential Lutheran theologian, in his *The Conservative Reformation and its Theology* (123ff.) claims that Arminius was largely influenced by Lutheranism. Krauth's decisive example is Arminius' choice and denial of the five points of Calvinism: It was Arminius, not some Calvinist, who selected the TULIP as the essence of Calvinism. On this, says Krauth, Arminianism and Lutheranism are in accord. Some semi-Calvinists

are in partial agreement. A. H. Strong (*Systematic Theology*, II, 635) remarks, "We prefer to attribute God's dealings to justice, rather than to sovereignty." This statement is immediately connected with the imputation of Adam's guilt to his posterity, but it is reasonable to suppose that Strong would say the same thing of the atonement also. The statement is vague, suggesting a mere preference that would allow some role to sovereignty if one should press it. Strong supports his preference by five considerations. The first is, "A probation [in the case of Adam] is more consistent with divine justice than a separate probation of each individual...." If we end the sentence here, the reply is that most people would insist that a probation of each individual is more just, while imputation more clearly depends on sovereignty. Actually the sentence continues "of each individual with [his] inexperience, inborn depravity, and evil example, all favorable to a decision against God." But with the exception of the evil example, the conditions falsify the situation. Adam was equally inexperienced, and a probation for each individual could occur only if each were innocent as Adam was. That is, the theory rejects inborn depravity. Hence the argument fails on two counts. Second, "A constitution which made a common fall possible may have been indispensable to any provision of a common salvation." The answer is, "may have been" is insufficient. To prove his point, Strong should have said, "must have been." Perhaps it is wise to omit Strong's other

reasons. They all seem irrelevant to me, but the reader can read Strong for himself and decide.

However, as was just said, the problem is essentially a problem for Calvinism because, unlike the other theologies, it stresses both justice and sovereignty. The question is, How are they related? On this subject, Charles Hodge has a peculiar paragraph. It seems to contradict itself. The subhead (*Systematic Theology*, I, 539) is "The Decrees of God are Free," and the following quotation is a part of it.

1. They [the decrees] are rational determinations, founded on sufficient reasons. This is opposed to the doctrine of necessity, which assumes that God acts by a mere necessity of nature, and that all that occurs is due to the law of development or of self-manifestation of the divine being. This reduces God to a mere *natura naturans*, or *vis formativa*, which acts without design. The true doctrine is opposed also to the idea that the only cause of events is an intellectual force analogous to the instincts of irrational animals. The acts performed under the guidance of instinct are not free acts, for liberty is a *libentia rationalis*, spontaneity determined by reason. It is therefore involved in the idea of God as a rational and personal being that his decrees are free. He was free to create or not to create ... to act or not act ... not from any blind necessity, but according to the counsel of his own will.

This paragraph contains considerable confusion; but before examining it, it will help to quote parts of a subsequent paragraph in which Hodge more clearly shows his basic orthodoxy.

The decrees of God are free in the sense of being absolute or sovereign.... the decrees of God are in no case conditional. The event decreed is suspended on a condition, but the purpose of God is not. It is inconsistent with the nature of God to assume suspense or indecision on his part. If he has not absolutely determined on what is to occur, but waits

until an undetermined condition is or is not fulfilled, then his decrees can neither be eternal nor immutable.

This latter paragraph is much clearer than the former. We may agree with the former that the decrees, including of course everything connected with the atonement, are "rational determinations." By this phrase, I understand that the whole plan of history is teleological. Prior events prepare for later events. Judas's betrayal prepared for the arrest and the crucifixion. But contrary to what Hodge says, this does not rule out "the doctrine of necessity." While one must reject the idea that there is any development in God, there is indeed development in history. Nor is the word "mere" very clear, when Hodge says that God does not act by a mere necessity of nature. If the term *natura* is meant to indicate the physical universe—Mother Nature as some poets call it, and *natura naturans* as Spinoza said—of course we agree with Hodge's statement. Furthermore, Hodge's reference to Spinoza seems to support the idea that he is thinking of the universe. Spinoza was a pantheist who frequently used the phrase *Deus sive Natura*. But Hodge seems to me to have confused Mother Nature with the nature of God. The important question is whether God acts necessarily by his own nature. Could God have willed to save no one? Could God have willed that Antony should have been victorious, or that the Duc de Guise should have defeated Henry IV? If one says that the defeat of Antony was necessitated and that God could not have willed otherwise, it does not follow, as Hodge seems to say it does, that God would have acted without design. Nor does the doctrine of necessity require that God's intellectual force be analogous to the instincts of irrational animals. At best Hodge has in his attack on Spinozism used language that can be applied to views that are not at all Spinozistic. And one of these views is the Christian doctrine of God and his decrees.

One of the terms the Hodges use with confidence and satisfaction is *freedom*. God was free to create or not to create; God was free to save or not to save men; but if he freely chose to save any, he was necessitated to sacrifice Christ. In this he was not free. It is reasonable to suppose that this language

somewhat reflects the discussions on the free will of man. At any rate, the idea of God's freedom should be clarified. Some types of freedom are obviously irrelevant to the present discussion: a man may be free from disease, free from prejudice, or free from his previous wife. Though these meanings are irrelevant, one notes that freedom is often, almost always, freedom *from* something.

Spinoza is an exception, for his freedom is a freedom *to*. A grain of wheat is free to grow, if it is planted in good soil rather than having fallen on a rock where a bird can pick it up. The bird is more free than a grain of wheat because, if this rock had no grain of wheat on it, the bird can fly and find food elsewhere. A man is more free than a bird because he can survive in many more circumstances. Thus, Spinoza says, freedom is not the ability to do either of two things in the same circumstance, but the ability to do the same thing in many circumstances.

Arminian and Romish freedom is the power of contrary choice. There is nothing, absolutely nothing in any circumstance in heaven above, or earth beneath, or the waters under the earth—but especially in heaven above—that necessitates a given volition. The opposite choice is always as possible as the one chosen.

But what might divine freedom be? One thing is clear. There is no power, circumstance, or principle external to God that necessitates or even induces him to do anything. Of course, before the creation of the world there were no circumstances at all, though some philosopher might say that there were eternal principles external to him. But for the Christian there was nothing before he created something. But does this mean that God could have chosen no to create?

The confusion that permeates discussion on this subject arises from the rather natural impulse to understand the will of God as similar to the will of man, or, more accurately, similar to what many theologians think the will of man is. In particular, they picture God as earlier undecided, and later at a moment in time God makes a choice. The theologian may indeed recognize that there is no

external motivation, but he still holds to the possibility that God could have willed otherwise.

This confusion is due to the fact that the authors often forget that God is immutable. Grotius seems to have argued that no one form of atonement is absolutely necessary. The law, he maintains, is a product of the divine *will* and not something inherent in his nature. Therefore God is *free* to enforce, to abrogate, or in any way to alter the laws. Grotius is not the only one who seems to assume that God's will is *free* in the sense that he can change his mind at any time. Freedom, however, should be defined, and the implications of the definition should be stated. For example, human freedom may consist in the circumstance that one's conduct is not determined by physicochemical law. From this definition, if accepted, it follows that the universe is not a mechanism. But, so far as this definition goes, human conduct can be necessitated by a divine teleological law. As for the freedom of God, he is surely free from control by any superior power, for there is no power superior to God. But as immutable by nature—see Grotius's distinction between will and nature a few lines above—God's will and action are unalterable.

Hodge—who rejects Grotius's view of the atonement—is perhaps a little, but not much, better. God, he says, "will the precept *because* it is *intrinsically* right.... There must be an absolute standard of righteousness." Such a statement places a standard of justice outside of God. The standard is *intrinsically* right, hence independent of God's sovereignty—indeed, sovereignty has been abandoned. Hodge, however, wants to avoid this implication, for unlike Grotius, Hodge immediately adds, "This absolute standard is the divine nature ... the divine intelligence." This addition gives the impression of maintaining divine sovereignty as against any external power or principle. But it faces an equally difficult objection. It raises the question as to the difference between will and nature. What is nature? Do we not speak of the nature of God, the nature of God's will, the nature of God's intelligence? Nature is not a constituent of anything. It is simply the thing's characteristics. God's nature, like a dog's nature, is such and such because such are the characteristics of the dog or of God. The

nature is simply the way the dog or God acts. There is no *nature* that controls God's will. As Isaac Watts once wrote, "Dogs delight to bark and bite, for 'tis their nature to."¹

In addition to examining the term *nature*, one must ask what is *will*? If we speak of the human will, we refer to a somewhat momentary act of choice. After having considered the relative desirability of this versus that line of action—or, what is the same thing, between an action and doing nothing—such as investing in AT&T or just leaving the money in the checking account—and having puzzled over it indecisively for a period of time—we come to a conclusion and make our choice: We decide and do it. Then when we start to study theology and to consider the will of God, we are apt to think, or subconsciously suppose, that God makes decisions. He willed to create, he willed—after some deliberation—to save some, and so on. Though we may not say so out loud, we suppose that God was puzzled: He could create or he could refuse to create; he could save or could refuse to save some; and if he decided to save some, he could use any means imaginable.

Now, although these choices are all of one nature, all subject to the same considerations, Hodge and others want to give the last question an answer different from their answer to the prior questions. This seems to me to be logically inconsistent, for if it relieves God of indecision on the last point, it pictures him as indecisive on the prior points and assigns to him a relatively momentary act of choice. This makes God a temporal creature—or if not a creature, at least a temporal being.

Such a view is utterly inconsistent with divine omniscience. The immutable God never learned anything and never changed his mind. He knew everything from eternity. This *everything* includes both the number of mosquitoes in Jackson Hole and the number of planets in the solar system. Underlying these two examples is the creation of a temporal universe. For time began with the creation of the first nonomniscient angel.

¹ The hymn, with animadversions on childhood, never became popular in the churches.

Without claiming infallibility, and certainly no omniscience, I believe the above to be substantially what the Bible implies. Perhaps one should quote a few of the more clearly supporting verses. This is all the more appropriate because many, even most, of the volumes on Systematic Theology are strangely deficient at this point. Fortunately the indispensable Charnock fills the gap. Yet as Charnock shows, most of the Scriptural references are examples rather than universal claims. If God knows the number of hair on our heads and calls all the stars by name and notices the fall of every sparrow, we are encouraged to believe that he knows everything. There are nonetheless certain more general statements and inferences from his other attributes. Some of the latter will be quoted first.

The first of these verses is one that can easily be misunderstood, but neither should it be undervalued.

Psalm 147:5: Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite.²

1 Samuel 2:3: The Lord is a God of knowledge.

Colossians 2:3: In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

These three—especially the latter two—are sufficiently universal and should, even by themselves, be considered conclusive. The next two might not seem universal by themselves, but it would be difficult to deny their implications.

² Though this verse helps to confirm God's omniscience, it must not be pressed too far. The Hebrew word does not mean *infinite*. In fact, Hebrew seems not to have any word meaning infinite. *Mispar*, the word in this verse, means a *number*. It can mean a small number or a large number. David sinfully wanted to know the relatively small number of his people. God knows the relatively large number of the stars. It is a delicate question whether God's knowledge is infinite in the English sense of the word. If it were, God's knowledge would be incomplete, if not unsystematic. The number of prime numbers equals the number of numbers because both are infinite; so that if God's knowledge were infinite, there would always be an extra item beyond the last. There would be no completeness. It is true that there can be an infinite 'number' of propositions by counting the series: Today is Tuesday, it is true that today is Tuesday, it is true that it is true that today is Tuesday, *ad nauseam*.

Isaiah 46:10: Declaring the end from the beginning.

Hebrews 4:13: There is no creature that is not manifest in his sight.

Could anyone be bold enough to assert that there are some non creatures which might not be manifest in his sight? The following verses show that God's knowledge neither increases nor diminishes because he is immutable and eternal.

Exodus 3:14: I AM THAT I AM.

Psalms 90:2: From everlasting to everlasting thou art God.

Malachi 3:6: I am the Lord, I change not.

1 Timothy 1:17: Unto the King eternal

James 1:7: The Father of lights with whom there is no variableness, nor shadow cast by turning.

Now come some verses that give examples, remarkable examples, of what God knows. Charnock cites dozens of such verses and expounds them all at length. Less than a half a dozen should suffice here. They all tie in with the doctrine of the Atonement.

John 13:18: I know whom I have chosen.

Romans 9:11: The children being not yet born ... That the purpose of God according to election might stand

Ephesians 1:4: ... chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.

Ephesians 1:9: ... according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself.

2 Timothy 2:19: The Lord knoweth them that are his.

Notice that the first and fifth verses quoted, not to mention the others, make sense only if there are some whom God did not choose and are not his.

From the immutability and omniscience of God, it follows necessarily that there is indeed no other possible method of salvation—not, however, for the reasons Hodge gives, but simply because of this

immutability. In much of this discussion, the authors speak as if God on one occasion produced an act of will and on another occasion he made another voluntary act. The Westminster Standards, however, reproduce the Biblical position that God is immutable. Therefore, not only is the propitiatory method of atonement absolutely necessary, but also the number of mosquitoes in the world at any given instant. Every detail is a part of the all-comprehensive divine decree. God foreordains whatever comes to pass. Everything is necessary. This view exalts the sovereignty of God. This view exalts God. Do not think that the reference to mosquitoes was flippant. William Cullen Bryant was no Calvinist, and his theology is deplorable; yet on one occasion he stated the truth, even if he could not properly apply it to himself. A Christian can detach his lines from the Bryant theology and repeat with appreciation these words from *To a Waterfowl*:

There is a Power whose care

Teaches thy way along that pathless coast,

The desert and illimitable air—

Lone wandering, but not lost.

He who, from zone to zone,

Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight,

In the long way that I must tread alone

Will lead my steps aright.

This settles the question as to whether the method of the atonement is based on sovereignty or on justice, and the question whether God could have refused or neglected to save anybody. Not a chance. As previously asserted by the present writer, the sacrifice of Christ on the cross satisfied the justice of the Father. But now it should be clear that justice is one facet of sovereignty. There is no moral principle superior to God. I can say that there is no moral principle superior to the will of God. God's will and God's intellect are identical. Justice is what God thinks. To suppose that anything could have been otherwise is to suppose that God could have been otherwise than he is. The salvation of the elect is a part of the sovereign play by which the universe

goes on. God had to create—not because there was some power external to him, but because he is God. A God who might not create, or would not have created, is simply not the Biblical God.

In this twentieth century, people like to be modern and up-to-date. Anything even ten years old—not to say two hundred or two thousand—is pass, benighted, medieval, stupid, unenlightened, erroneous, illogical, and just plain false. We today are educated. As one sweet little third-grader told her mother: I don't need to learn arithmetic; I'm developing a social consciousness. That is why Johnny can't read—theology.

Some Christians, *mirabile dictu* and *gloria in excelsisDeo*, still remember *Rock of Ages*. Of course, they do not know that the author wrote on the present subject, any more than they know of his other 149 hymns. Here then is something quite new and up to date, so far as the present generation is concerned.

Augustus Toplady wrote, among other things, "Observations on the Divine Attributes."³ The simplicity of God and the identity of all the divine attributes, used above to settle the relation between justice and sovereignty, Toplady expresses in the following words. "Although the great and ever blessed God is a Being absolutely simple ... he is, nevertheless, in condescension to our weak and contracted faculties, represented in Scripture as possessed of divers properties, or attributes, which though seemingly different from his essence, are in reality essential to him, and constitutive of his very nature" (p. 675, col. 1). Toplady, then, specifies "his eternal wisdom, the absolute freedom and liberty of his will, the perpetuity and unchangeableness, both of himself and his decrees, his omnipotence, justice, and mercy."

The material is so good that it demands great restraint not to quote the entire article, twelve pages of long double columns. Fear not, modern reader, I shall give only a few short paragraphs.

³ Pagination from *The Complete Works of Augustus M. Toplady*, London, 1869.

God is ... so perfectly wise that nothing ... can elude his knowledge ... 'Known unto God are all his works from eternity.' Consequently God knows nothing ... which he did not know and foresee from everlasting.... Whatever he foreknows to be future shall necessarily and undoubtedly come to pass. For his knowledge can be no more frustrated... than he can cease to be God. Nay, could either of these things be the case, he actually would cease to be God.

Some people argue that knowledge or foreknowledge does not necessitate anything. Even a man may know that an event will occur tomorrow, but this does not mean that he causes it to happen. Perhaps so. But if he does not cause it to happen, there must be some other cause which does; for unless it were certain, he could not know it.⁴ Now, then, since omniscience shows that all events are certain, it follows that if God does not cause them, there must be a cause external to and independent of God. In other words, God has ceased to be God. Toplady recognizes this in this paragraph: "God's foreknowledge, taken abstractly, is not the sole cause of beings and events; but his will and foreknowledge together. Hence we find, Acts 2:23, that his determinate counsel and foreknowledge act in concert, the latter resulting from and being founded on, the former" (675, col.2).⁵ Note that *foreknowledge* is dependent on determinate counsel. This is not true of a man. For example, I know that Christ will return. The event is determined, certain, and necessary. But I did not determine it.

Just a few more lines from Toplady: "Whatever comes to pass comes to pass by virtue of this absolute omnipotent will of God, which is the

⁴ The illustration is faulty from the start because no man knows what will happen tomorrow.

⁵ I have not quoted an intervening paragraph which asserts that though man acts "from the first to the last moment of his life, in absolute subserviency ... To the purposes and decrees of God concerning him; notwithstanding which he acts freely and voluntarily as if he was *sui prijuris*, ... absolutely lord of himself." Translating this, and John Gill's term, *coaction*, into twentieth-century English, it means that man is free from the compulsion or 'coaction' of physicochemical mathematical equations. But that the will is not free from God, and that it is God who makes us willing, is stated in the Westminster Confession, X, i; compare IX,3.

primary and supreme cause of allthings.... The will of God is so the cause of all things as to be itself without cause; for nothing can be the cause of that which is the cause of everything" (677). Later in the volume (784-819, all double columns) there is his article, "The Scheme of Christian and Philosophical Necessity Asserted."

In contrast with the types of interest prominent among the relatively conservative Christians of the present day, those of an earlier age can be instructive. William Cunningham, Professor of Church History at New College, Edinburgh, recounts⁶ an interesting attack on Dr. Chalmers by Sir William Hamilton. The latter denounced the former as a fatalist, a pantheist, and as being ignorant and suicidal in theology. His reason was that Chalmers taught the doctrine of philosophical necessity. Cunningham's conclusion was that the Westminster Confession permits but does not teach philosophical necessity, that Chalmers not only was at liberty to accept that view, but that also his orthodoxy was impeccable.

On a lower level, a much lower level, *The Presbyterian Journal*, November 18, 1981, includes an article by the Rev. Donald A. Dunkerley entitled "Hyper-Calvinism Today." This author is to be highly commended because he knows what hyper-Calvinism is, and he states the definition clearly. Most popular writers and preachers neither state nor know it. Hyper-Calvinism is "that view of Calvinism which holds that 'there is no world-wide call to Christ sent out to all sinners, neither are all men bidden to take him as their Savior.' Hyper-Calvinists ... maintain that Christ should be held forth or offered as Savior to those only whom God effectually calls" (14).

It seems that there are such people, people who are derisively called Hard-shell Baptists. There must be very few such, and I do not know of any Presbyterians who qualify. Dunkerley himself acknowledges that they are "an almost negligible minority."

Yet, though he knows very well what the term means, he wants to extend its pejorative overtones to people to whom the term does not apply. His method is to ask rhetorical questions which he wants his readers to answer in the affirmative, when clearly the correct answer is negative. In spite of his acknowledgment that Hyper-Calvinists are an almost negligible minority, and after describing various forms of evangelism, he complains that "we lack and urgently need in our day [a] compassionate evangelism." Well, this is true, but in its context it seems to mean that hyper-Calvinism is almost the worst aberration of the twentieth century. Perhaps also of the eighteenth century, for Whitefield, whom he cites with approval, hardly evinces the evangelistic methods he seems to require.

Of course the Bible commands us to preach the Gospel to all men. To a hyper-Calvinist who insisted that a minister should preach the Gospel only to the elect, Clarence Edward Macartney, if I remember correctly, replied, "You point out to me which persons are the elect and I shall confine my preaching to them."

But when Mr. Dunkerley wants to tell everyone that "God loves you," I wonder how he can defend that phrase when not only Jacob, but Esau also is in the audience.⁷

Such then is my view of sovereignty, and my replies to assorted objections. *Deo soli gloria.*

⁶ *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation*; first published, 1862; London 1967; 471-524.

⁷ In the article it seems that the hyper-Calvinist and Mr. Dunkerley misunderstand John 3:16, and that the latter's doctrine of assurance is at variance with the First Epistle of John

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Providence and Thanksgiving

John W. Robbins

This is a pleasant essay to write, for in the past year something extraordinary has happened to me, and I must speak about it. Our closest friends already know much of this information, but the matter is so amazing that everyone should know. God is great and greatly to be praised.

The Bad News

In mid-September 2005 I consulted my doctor for a routine physical examination. I had had nothing more serious (or so I thought) than indigestion for about a year, and I had successfully treated it with over-the-counter antacids. But the laboratory tests indicated moderate anemia, though everything else appeared to be in order. Because of my age (56), family history (my mother and her sister had died of colorectal cancer in their sixties), and the fact that I had never had a colonoscopy, my doctor scheduled me for the exam. By the end of September I had the diagnosis: poorly differentiated adenocarcinoma of the ascending colon. It was an aggressive, malignant, and large tumor. My family and I were stunned.

In the days between colonoscopy (Monday) and diagnosis (Friday), I had further tests; my wife Linda and I set about putting our affairs in order; we informed the rest of the family; and my youngest daughter, Meri, using her research skills on the Internet, began looking for the best surgeons and scheduling appointments with them for me. The Monday following my diagnosis we were in Durham, North Carolina, consulting Dr. Douglas Tyler at Duke University Hospital, one of the best colon cancer surgeons in the country. The following Friday we consulted Dr. Michael Choti at The Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, one of the best surgical oncologists in the world. Both surgeons gave the same advice: immediate resection of the colon followed by chemotherapy.

On October 13, after a battery of further tests at Duke, Dr. Tyler performed a right hemicolectomy, removed many lymph nodes from my abdomen, and wedged two tumors he had found on my liver. The diagnosis was confirmed, and the cancer was Stage IV, the worst possible stage. Dr.

Tyler was not optimistic. During the operation, he had found evidence of peritoneal disease, an intractable condition in which cancer has invaded the peritoneum. He also left one tumor in my liver, difficult to resect because of its location.

My daughters Juley and Laura and their families had traveled to visit me at Duke before and after surgery. After several days in the hospital, Linda, who had stayed in my hospital room, drove Meri and me home to Tennessee so I could recuperate from the surgery. (Linda is a Christian high school teacher, and her school allowed her to stay with me at Duke, and would later do the same when I went to Johns Hopkins.) In the meantime, my brother and sister found over-the-counter agents to use against cancer, and I began taking them soon after surgery. In early November I sent a letter to friends informing them of my precarious health situation, and they started praying for my health, my family, and The Foundation. Several sent gifts to help with medical expenses. God has blessed me with a loving and knowledgeable family, and in his providence he had led me to the most competent doctors. Now hundreds of people were praying for my recovery.

Later in November I visited medical oncologists near our home in Tennessee. I choose Dr. Thomas R. Johnson, who is meticulous, cautious, and considerate in his treatment of patients. In mid-December I started chemotherapy, taking both the oldest and newest agents: fluorouracil, leucovorin (a vitamin), oxaliplatin, and bevacizumab (a biologic agent). (I tried to obtain another new biologic agent, panitumumab, by signing up for a Phase III clinical trial, but I was randomized into the control arm of the trial.) Dr. Johnson pre-treats his patients for side effects of the toxic chemicals, which prevented most of the common side effects. But in January, after only three treatments (the recommended series is twelve treatments), I suffered rare and severe side effects, and he stopped all chemotherapy. Since surgery, my one remaining tumor had shrunk to half its previous size. I immediately scheduled liver surgery with Dr. Choti at Johns Hopkins. (I told him that the Latin fine print on my diploma entitled me to one free surgery at Hopkins, but he

sent me a bill anyway.) On February 28 Dr. Choti successfully removed the one remaining tumor and 25 percent of my liver, using techniques and instruments he had pioneered for such surgeries.

The Good News

After the surgery, Dr. Choti reported that there was now no evidence of disease in my abdomen. This was extraordinary: I had been in Stage IV in October, and my first surgeon, Dr. Tyler, had been somewhat pessimistic about my prospects. Five months later, I was in the condition cancer patients call NED – no evidence of disease. This was most extraordinary. I am told that the median survival time of someone with Stage IV colon cancer is less than a year. Peritoneal disease makes it almost a foregone conclusion. But God not only had removed the tumors, but also the peritoneal disease. The condition that made Dr. Tyler pessimistic in October was completely gone by the end of February. The liver itself, a most remarkable organ, grew back to normal size in about six weeks.

Although I was now NED, both Dr. Choti and Dr. Johnson advised me to have further chemotherapy as a precaution. The statistics suggest that even if treatment is successful, this sort of cancer returns in most cases, and chemotherapy, they thought, might thwart or slow its return by killing any cancer cells floating around in my bloodstream. So I began chemotherapy again in May, this time taking only fluorouracil and leucovorin. I received these three-day treatments every two weeks during May, June, and July before once again developing a reaction that caused Dr. Johnson to stop all chemo. But in April, July, September, and October, all tests, including three PET/CTs, could find no disease. Since July I have had no chemotherapy, and I am scheduled to be tested every three months for any sign of recurrence. The doctors continue to report no detectable disease.

A Miracle?

Some have called what has happened to me a miracle. Improving from Stage IV to NED in five months and staying there, for eight months now, is indeed remarkable and extraordinary. But this extraordinary healing should not be called a miracle. All healing is from God, but the term *miracle* should be restricted only to those events described as such in the Bible. There we have reports of people with various disorders – blindness, lameness, deafness, death, demon possession – being healed by Christ, the prophets, and the apostles. These cases differ in several ways from extraordinary healings today.

First, we know infallibly that the diagnoses stated in Scripture are true and accurate. Because Scripture is inerrant, we know that the man who was born blind (see *John 9*), for example, was in fact born blind. (The rulers of the synagogue tried to find out whether he was or not by

questioning people, including his parents.) But there is no such knowledge in medical science. Patients sometimes lie; tests yield both false positives and false negatives; doctors jump to false conclusions; and patients are frequently misdiagnosed, sometimes for years. There is a very good reason that doctors speak of “second opinions”: All science, including medical science, deals only in opinions, not in knowledge, that is, not in proven truth. To suggest that the investigations of scientists can attain such knowledge demeans Scripture and propositional revelation. It also asserts a theory of knowledge that is itself false and logically indefensible. To understand science and its proper purpose, which is not cognition, one ought to study Gordon Clark’s book *The Philosophy of Science and Belief in God*. Scientists, including physicians, are always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. They are properly interested in what works, not what is true.

A proper understanding of the limitations of medical science tends to make doctors humble. Some doctors, like some men in every profession, are know-it-alls, but they are likely to be the least competent and the worst educated. The most competent doctors are not know-it-alls. Because they understand both the limitations of science and their own limitations, they tend to be more cautious, more thorough, and to listen more attentively to patients. They will accept with gratitude a journal article in their field that they have not seen – and actually read it. In the past year I have spoken with many doctors, and my impression is that the more competent the doctor, the more humble he is, because he better understands the limitations of science. After my second surgery one cancer marker increased rather than decreased, as one might have expected it would. Dr. Choti explained that there is so large a margin of error in the test that the fluctuation is meaningless. But margins of error do not fit into any philosophy of science that asserts that science discovers truth. In truth the margin of error is zero.

The second reason we call some healings reported in the Bible miracles is that the divine healing miracles reported in Scripture were always the result of actions taken by God-sent prophets or apostles or the Son of Man himself. Christ, Peter, or Elijah did something in order to accomplish the healing, but they never used medicine. Infrequently they used mud, water, and a touch, but almost always they used only a spoken word. These demonstrations of power over disease and death corroborated their claims to speak a message from God. However, there are no God-sent prophets and apostles on Earth today. The writing of the New Testament was completed in the first century (not the fourth), and so we have the full and final revelation, to which nothing is to be added; the Son of Man is now seated at the right hand of God the Father in Heaven; and, since there are no God-sent messengers on Earth, there are no present-day divine miracles. (Just as the wizards of ancient Egypt could perform a limited number of miracles but could not match Moses’ divine miracles, it is possible that there are diabolical miracles on

Earth today. Next year we hope to bring out a new edition of Benjamin Warfield's 1918 book, *Counterfeit Miracles*, because it sets forth in great detail the Biblical view of divine and diabolical miracles.) If there are no miracle-working prophets and apostles on Earth today, then Paul Crouch, Benny Hinn, Pat Robertson, and their ilk are impostors and false prophets. They have no message from God, but they use God's name in vain in their shameless attempts to lend credence to and collect money for their bizarre ideas and ministries. Today's "faith-healers" and "miracle-workers" have no anointing from the Holy Spirit; therefore, they cannot and do not perform divine miracles (though whether they perform diabolical miracles is an open question).

However, the televised faith-healers are rank amateurs compared to the Roman Catholic Church-State, which for more than a millennium has claimed the power to perform miracles. The Roman Church keeps millions of allegedly wonder-working relics in its churches and repositories around the world; it even claims that every time a priest or a bishop says, "Hoc est corpus meum," a cracker becomes the literal body and blood of Jesus Christ, and those who eat the consecrated cracker and drink the consecrated wine are eating the literal, physical, body and drinking the literal, physical blood of Jesus Christ. Such claims are not true; they are not Biblical; they are disgusting, blasphemous hoaxes that many gullible people believe. God's warning through the prophet Jeremiah is relevant to our situation today:

Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless; they speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the Lord. They continually say to those who despise me, "The Lord has said, You shall have peace" and to everyone who walks according to the imagination of his own heart, "No evil shall come upon you...."

I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they would have turned them from their evil way and from the evil of their doings....

I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, "I have dreamed! I have dreamed!" How long will this be in the hearts of the prophets who prophesy lies? Indeed they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart, who try to make my people forget my name by their dreams which everyone tells his neighbor....

Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, says the Lord, who steal my words, every one, from his neighbor. Behold, I am against the prophets, says the Lord, who use their tongues and say, "He says." Behold, I am against those who prophesy false dreams, says the Lord, and tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies and by their recklessness. Yet I did not send them or command them [*Jeremiah 23*].

Just as ancient Israel had her false prophets, so the modern religious world has its false prophets, whom God will punish for twisting his word, taking his name in vain, and telling lies.

The third reason we call the healings in the Bible divine miracles but we should not call healings today divine miracles is that we know the people in the Bible were actually cured. When the infallible Word of God says that the deaf were made to hear, the blind to see, and the lame to walk, we know those things are true. The God who cannot lie or err says so. But the opinions of medical science are just that: opinions. They may or may not be true; and medical science cannot tell which. Using the most sophisticated machines, tests, and techniques, the doctors cannot detect any disease in my body, but that does not mean it is not there. Not only are all tests fallible, but sinful men make mistakes as well. The most that we can say is not that I am cured, but that there is no detectable disease in my body. This humble recognition of the limits of science brings us to the matter of prayer.

The Power of Prayer?

Some have attributed my remarkable recovery to the power of prayer. What role does prayer play in healing? It was widely reported that someone recently conducted an extensive investigation of the effect of prayer on the recovery of hospitalized patients and concluded that prayer had no effect on their recovery. Rather than being surprised, I expected that outcome. Why? Because the prayer in question was generic: Any petition to any god by anyone was included as prayer. One might as well argue that the prayers of the 451 prophets (see *1 Kings 18*) show that prayer is almost never answered.

Christians, however, do not believe in the power of prayer: Rather, they believe in the power of God. American religion – I do not say Christianity – has become so subjective and man-centered that the "power of prayer" and the "power of faith" are touted continually. Power is ascribed to our words – prayer – and to our believing, rather than to the effective Word of God, who heals by speaking a word. This subjectivism – this idolatry – explains why Christ warned us not to think that much speaking, chanting, or rote recital of prayers is Christian prayer. God does not and will not listen to such prayers. Instead, Christian prayer is to be done privately and succinctly, and comprises praise to God as well as our petitions for help. The model prayer that Christ taught his disciples in the Gospels is focused on God on Heaven, his holy name, and the advancement of his Gospel and Kingdom. Prayer is speaking to God in Heaven, and it is God, not prayer, who hears and heals. Faith is believing God's Word; it is his Word, not our believing, that saves and heals us. In our idolatrous religious subjectivism, we have not kept our minds on our Heavenly Father, but we have focused on our praying and our believing.

Deism and Predestination

Furthermore, God alone heals. In the Gospels Christ once used mud, but on me he used surgery and medicine. God himself performed the first surgery in the Garden of Eden before the Fall, and the good Samaritan properly treated the beaten, half-dead man with wine (antiseptic), oil (ointment), and bandages. Unlike Christ, the good Samaritan used medicine, and God healed the half-dead man using those means. Some men (though there are cults that deny their importance) seem to understand the importance of surgery and medicine, but they have difficulty understanding the role of prayer. Sinners tend to be deists; even many who profess to be Christians think that the universe has its own intrinsic laws – natural laws – by which it operates. The doctrine of natural law – in both its moral and physical senses – is one of the great superstitions of the fallen mind. It allows sinful men to ascribe power and offer praise to Nature – with a capital N, of course – rather than to God – to the creature, rather than to the Creator. But there are no natural laws, in either the physical or the moral sense. The universe is not a watch that someone long ago wound up. Rather, it is completely dependent at every moment on the thought of God. King David was not a deist; he understood that all the good he had received or ever would receive had come directly from God in Heaven:

The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside the still waters: He restores my soul. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff – they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Notice that God is always, and in every situation, the active agent: God gives rest; God gives refreshment; God gives salvation; God gives eternal life. Though we have plenty of food in our kitchens, we ought to pray daily for our daily bread, because it is God alone who makes that food nourish our bodies. And it is God alone who heals.

The End of the Matter

In the past year I have walked through the valley of the shadow of death, and God has preserved me. I am profoundly grateful to my family, to my friends who have prayed for me faithfully, and to my doctors and nurses who have treated me with competence and compassion. But all their efforts would have amounted to nothing had not God blessed them. While I was sick a friend reminded me of a passage from Jerome Zanchius' book *Absolute Predestination*. It is an eloquent statement of who God is and what he does:

Without a due sense of predestination, we shall lack the surest and the most powerful inducement to patience, resignation, and dependence on God under every spiritual and temporal affliction. How sweet must the following considerations be to a distressed believer:

1. There most certainly exists an almighty, all-wise, and infinitely gracious God.
2. He has given me in times past, and is giving me at present (if I had but eyes to see it), many remarkable intimations of his love to me, both in a way of providence and grace.
3. This love of his is immutable; he never repents of it nor withdraws it.
4. Whatever comes to pass in time is the result of his will from everlasting.
5. Consequently, my afflictions were a part of his original plan, and are all ordered in number, weight, and measure.
6. The very hairs of my head are (every one) counted by him, nor can a single hair fall to the ground but in consequence of his determination.
7. Hence, my distresses are not the result of chance, accident, or a fortuitous combination of circumstances, but
8. The providential accomplishment of God's purpose, and
9. Designed to answer some wise and gracious ends.
10. Nor shall my affliction continue a moment longer than God sees meet.
11. He who brought me to it has promised to support me under it and to carry me through it.
12. All shall, most assuredly, work together for his glory and my good.
13. Therefore, "The cup which my heavenly Father has given me to drink: Shall I not drink it?"

Yes, I will, in the strength he imparts, even rejoice in tribulation; and using the means of possible redress, which he has or may hereafter put into my hands, I will commit myself and the event to him, whose purpose cannot be overthrown, whose plan cannot be disconcerted, and who, whether I am resigned or not, will still go on to work all things after the counsel of his own will.

Above all, when the suffering Christian takes his election into account, and knows that he was by an eternal and immutable act of God appointed to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, that, of course, he has a city prepared for him above, a building of God, a house not made with hands, but eternal in the heavens; and that the heaviest sufferings of the present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in the saints, what adversity can possibly befall us which the assured hope of blessings like these will not infinitely overbalance? However keenly afflictions might wound us on their first access, yet, under the impression of such animating views we should quickly come to ourselves again, and the arrows of tribulation, would, in great measure lose their sharpness. Christians need nothing but absolute resignation to render them perfectly happy in every possible circumstance, and absolute resignation can only flow from an absolute belief of and an absolute acquiescence in God's absolute providence, founded on absolute predestination.

May God bless us all with such an understanding of his power, wisdom, love, and providence.

