

Chosen by God (Table of Contents)

This is my critical review of R.C. Sproul's book *Chosen by God*.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### The Struggle

For many, *Chosen by God* is considered to be a classic (though not exhaustive) introduction to Calvinism. It is one of the most popular books written by R.C. Sproul. Sproul has become somewhat of a celebrity in the Reformed and Calvinist world. He is highly respected and considered to be a competent theologian and teacher. He is known for his ability to write about supposedly “complex doctrines” in a very understandable way.

The following is a critical review of this exceedingly popular book. At the outset of this review, I must call the reader’s attention to the words of Jesus Christ regarding those who would love the glory of men more than the glory of God (John 12:43). Those who respect the face of men no matter what they teach, no matter if their teaching robs God of His redemptive glory, are those who love the glory of men. With this preface, let us begin our review.

Sproul’s opening chapter is entitled “The Struggle” in which he discusses man’s alleged inviolable freedom from the sovereign control of his Creator. Sproul writes how even the word “predestination” has an ominous ring to it and how it is linked to fatalism and suggests that men are reduced to meaningless puppets (p. 9). Of course, Sproul is simply showing here how many view this doctrine. As even a cursory reading of Isaiah 10:5-15 should demonstrate, a word like “fatalism” and a phrase such as “meaningless puppets” are MUCH TOO WEAK to describe the kind of control the Assyrians’ Creator had over them.

Sproul says that his struggle with predestination began “early in [his] Christian life” (p. 11). After much resistance to this doctrine, the combination of Gerstner, Edwards, his New Testament professor, and the apostle Paul’s ninth chapter to the Romans (which was the “clincher”) finally brought him to say this:

“Reluctantly, I sighed and surrendered, but with my head, not my heart. ‘OK, I believe this stuff, but I don’t have to like it!’” (p. 13).

Sproul’s unbiblical and anti-gospel head-heart distinction aside, he makes the huge assumption that the biblical doctrine of predestination is something that a true Christian struggles with. On the contrary, the apostle Paul strongly rebukes those who have such struggles (Romans 9:19-21). Thus, this struggle was not early in Sproul’s Christian life for Sproul here clearly shows that he was Paul’s unbelieving objector.

Sproul continues:

“The struggle about predestination is all the more confusing because the greatest minds in the history of the church have disagreed about it. Scholars and Christian leaders, past and present, have taken different stands. A brief glance at church history reveals that the debate over predestination is not between liberals and conservatives or between believers and unbelievers. It is a debate among believers, among godly and earnest Christians. It may be helpful to see how the great teachers of the past line up on the question (p. 14).

Sproul then sets up a list of “great teachers” who he thinks are “godly and earnest Christians.” Included in this list are Pelagius and Charles Finney (evidently for Sproul it’s “Saint Pelagius” and “Saint Finney”). So, by the standard of R.C. Sproul the great heresiarch of the 5th century is a “*godly and earnest Christian.*” If Pelagius is not a God-hating heretic, then there is no such thing as a God-hating heretic. If the Apostle Paul had employed Sproul’s standard of judgment, he would not have *anathematized* those in Galatia (Galatians 1:8-9), but would have referred to them as “*godly and earnest Christians.*”

Paul had written that the gospel is the power of God to salvation to everyone believing (Romans 1:16). Sproul believed that Pelagius and Finney were men to

whom salvation belonged. Thus, logically, Sproul believed that both Pelagius and Finney believed the gospel. Now what does that say about what Sproul believes are the doctrines that are essential to the gospel? What does that say about what “gospel” Sproul thinks is the power of God to salvation? Clearly Sproul must think that the false gospel which Paul anathematized is the power of God unto salvation.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Predestination and the Sovereignty of God

In his second chapter on “Predestination and the Sovereignty of God,” Sproul writes:

“In most discussions about predestination, there is a great concern about protecting the dignity and freedom of man. But we must also observe the crucial importance of the sovereignty of God. Though God is not a creature, he is personal, with supreme dignity and supreme freedom. We are aware of the ticklish problems surrounding the relationship between God’s sovereignty and human freedom” (pp. 23-24).

The reason there is a great concern about protecting man’s “dignity and freedom” is because rebel man does not like being a creature — for he would impose his own autonomous standard upon the Almighty that tells God that he has certain inalienable rights that He must respect. Now, depending on how one defines “freedom,” man has a certain kind of creaturely freedom relative to things that are not God. But there are absolutely no “ticklish problems” surrounding the relationship between God’s sovereignty and human freedom since man has no freedom whatsoever relative to God.

More from R.C.:

“All power in this universe is subordinate to him. Even Satan is powerless without God’s sovereign permission to act. Christianity is not dualism” (p. 24)

Christianity is certainly not dualism, but Sproul’s Calvinism is in fact a kind of semi-dualism. For God to give Satan “sovereign permission” to act is the same as saying that God sovereignly decides to give up some of His sovereignty to the

Devil. Calvinism is not Christianity. For in Christianity there is no creature that is free from God's efficient and active control.

One of Sproul's duties as a seminary professor is to teach the theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF). He mentions an evening class filled with students and guests that was open to the public. In this class Sproul read from the opening lines of chapter 3 of the WCF which states that God according to His own will, ordains whatsoever comes to pass. Sproul asked who disagreed with what he just read. A multitude of hands were raised. His follow up question was "Are there any convinced atheists in the room?" Not a hand went up. Sproul then said:

"Everyone who raised his hand to the first question should also have raised his hand to the second question" (p. 25).

Those who raised their hands were of course not advocates of "atheism proper," but Psalm 14:1 certainly fits these rebel pots like a form-fitted glove. Sproul's lesson to his students was that

"[w]e must hold tightly to God's sovereignty. Yet we must do it in such a way so as not to violate human freedom" (p. 27).

Sorry, Sproul. It's too late. God already "holds tightly" to His sovereignty in such a way so as to "violate [the] human freedom" of Sihon, the Hivites, Absalom, Pul, Tilgath-pilneser, and Cyrus — to name just a few (Deuteronomy 2:30; Joshua 11:19-20; 2 Samuel 12:11-12, 16:22; 1 Chronicles 5:26; 2 Chronicles 36:22-23).

Next is Sproul's discussion of "God's sovereignty and the problem of evil":

"Surely the most difficult question of all is how evil can coexist with a God who is both altogether holy and altogether sovereign...Then, as now, I realized that evil was a problem for the sovereignty of God...We know that man was created with a free will and that man freely chose to sin...The

mystery of sin is tied to our understanding of free will, man's state in creation, and God's sovereignty. The question of free will is so vital to our understanding of predestination that we will devote an entire chapter to the subject" (pp. 28-29).

The reason Sproul sees it as "the most difficult question of all" is because he thinks God's active causation of sin would be a display of unholiness on God's part. But the apostle Paul stuffs a contradicting sock in Sproul's mutinous mouth by asserting that God's active causation of evil is a holy display of His power and wrath (Romans 9:22). Evil is NOT a problem for the sovereignty of God; it is only a problem for the rebellious potsherds of the earth who fancy themselves altogether more holy than God (Isaiah 45:9).

Sproul says we KNOW man was created with a free will. Really? Who told Sproul that? Augustine? Edwards? Certainly no Prophet or Apostle in Scripture told him. Indeed man has a will that "freely chose to sin" according to his own desire. But that desire and choice is actively controlled and determined by God (Proverbs 21:1; cf. Isaiah 10:5-15).

"If it is true that in some sense God foreordains everything that comes to pass, then it follows with no doubt that God must have foreordained the entrance of sin into the world. That is not to say that God forced it to happen or that he imposed evil upon his creation" (p. 31).

What is with the strawmen words "forced" and "imposed"? What God does in exercising His sovereign right to actively ordain the entrance of sin is infinitely stronger than "forcing" and "imposing." If God had to "force" it to happen He would not be God. God does NOT force; God actively and powerfully works out in time that which He has ordained from eternity (which includes the entrance of sin into the world through Satan and Adam).

God's eternal decision to actively cause sin to enter the world was a good decision

because God desired to glorify Himself in the salvation of a particular people and in the damnation of a pernicious people (cf. Romans 9:22-23). The fact that God CAUSES a man to sin (i.e., hardens) by a powerful and active efficiency does NOT in any way absolve that man from his responsibility for sin despite Paul's objector's complaints to the contrary (Romans 9:18-21).

Sproul sets forth the following query and answer:

“Why does God only save some? If we grant that God can save men by violating their wills, why then does he not violate everybody's will and bring them all to salvation? (I am using the word violate here not because I really think there is any wrongful violation but because the non-Calvinist insists on the term). The only answer I can give to this question is that I don't know. I have no idea why God saves some but not all. I don't doubt for a moment that God has the power to save all, but I know that he does not choose to save all. I don't know why” (pp. 36-37).

Sproul does not know why because he is willfully ignorant of the Scriptural teaching laid out so clearly and lucidly in the ninth chapter of Romans. God does not save all because God desires to display wrath and power in the non-elect vessels of wrath so that the elect vessels of mercy may know the riches of His glory. A five-letter word called “grace” is what separates one from the other. And this grace is found in the cross-work (His atoning blood and imputed righteousness) of Jesus Christ alone.

Under the subheading of “God's sovereignty and human freedom” Sproul writes:

“Every Christian gladly affirms that God is sovereign...But the bare fact of God's sovereignty raises one more big question. How is God's sovereignty related to human freedom? (p. 39)

Every Christian gladly affirms this, but most who call themselves Calvinist do NOT

affirm this. Sproul (and those like-minded with him) definitely does NOT affirm God's sovereignty, but robs much of it from Him.

The relation between God's sovereignty and human freedom is similar to the relation between an axe and a woodsman, between a pot and a potter (Isaiah 10:15; Romans 9:21). Someone may ask, "Humans are more than axes and pottery, aren't they?" Indeed they are. And God is also more than a woodsman and more than a potter. Please note that metaphors and figures of speech are much *less* than what they represent, not greater. Man is more than an inanimate axe and God is more than a woodsman.

The control God exercises over man is much greater than the control a woodsman has over an axe. And just as the woodsman actively swings the axe, so does God actively control the man. Sproul's abysmal view of God's sovereignty has the woodsman "permitting" the axe to swing all by itself — this is as ridiculous as it is blasphemous.

"If human freedom and divine sovereignty are real contradictions, then one of them, at least, has to go. If sovereignty excludes freedom and freedom excludes sovereignty, then either God is not sovereign or man is not free" (p. 41).

As we have seen thus far, R.C. Sproul and Calvinists like him stubbornly refuse to jettison the humanistic medicine that has been fed to them. They have turned up their collective noses at the Scriptural physic that would purge them of their pestilent presumption that man has a will that is free from God's control. The Biblical teaching is that God IS sovereign and man is NOT free.

Sproul ends chapter 2 with the following:

"The big issue remains. The grand debate that stirs the cauldron of controversy centers on the question, 'What does predestination do to our

free will?' We will examine that issue in the next chapter" (p. 48).

Well, in one sense predestination does nothing to "free will" since "free will" does not exist except as a vain and mutinous figment of Sproul's imagination. The will of man is determined by God. Obviously, there is absolutely NO freedom there. No man is free to resist the decretive will of God to actively and efficiently harden him (Romans 9:19). Sproul will then say to me, "*Why does He yet find fault?*"

## CHAPTER THREE

### Predestination and Free Will

Chapter 3 is called “Predestination and Free Will.” Sproul writes:

“To get a handle on the puzzling relationship between predestination and free will, we must first define free will” (p. 51).

To those who are not wonderfully confused about the Creator/creature distinction it is not puzzling in the least. As for defining “free will” there is the Biblical definition that denies that unregenerate man has the ability to choose to believe in the true God and the true Christ and the true gospel. Even Sproul would profess to affirm this much. In fact, most of what Sproul writes about in this chapter is about this aforementioned view of “free will.”

BUT there is also the larger issue of “free will” that has to do purely with God’s sovereignty. This particular Biblical definition denies that a person has the “free will” to do any wicked thing and affirms that a person can only do the specific wicked thing that God actively causes him to do.

“Christian thinkers have given us two very important definitions of free will. We will consider first the definition offered by Jonathan Edwards in his classic work, *On the Freedom of the Will*. Edwards defined the will as ‘the mind choosing’” (p. 53).

If we were to stop at this definition then everyone would have “free will” in this sense. But “the mind choosing” says nothing about what this mind is able to choose, or whether or not God is the One who determines what this mind will choose to do.

“A second definition of free will is ‘the ability to choose what we want’” (p. 54).

From Paul’s explanation of the Exodus account we see that Pharaoh chose what he wanted. He wanted to rebel against the command of God. And God actively and efficiently worked this desire into the heart of Pharaoh in order to display His

power in him (Romans 9:17).

“Think for a minute about your own choices. How and why are they made? At this very instant you are reading the pages of this book. Why? Did you pick up this book because you have an interest in the subject of predestination, a desire to learn more about this complex subject?” (p. 54)

I picked up this book by virtue of God’s eternal decree. In time God fulfilled this decree by stirring my spirit within me, seeing that Sproul and much of the professing Calvinist world is wholly given to idolatry. For most who call themselves “Calvinist” or “Reformed” say that God is IN CONTROL of all things but does not actively CONTROL all things. How is that possible? Well, to anyone with a sound mind, it’s NOT possible. It’s a contradiction. A “god” who does not actively control what He creates is NOT the sovereign God of the Bible. It is an idol.

The true doctrine of predestination is NOT complex. It is quite simple and easy to understand. But we have Calvinist authors and seminarians like R.C. Sproul who due to their suppression of the truth in unrighteousness desire to make it appear complex by dreaming up all kinds of intricate theories in order to justify their view of their god who doesn’t cause everything while somehow remaining sovereign. They have to concoct these fables, these fictions about God, in order to force all their preconceived notions into the Bible’s clear teaching of God’s sovereignty.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Adam's Fall and Mine

In chapter 4, “Adam’s Fall and Mine” Sproul talks about how many people object to God choosing Adam as their representative and imputing his sin to them (pp. 90-93). Then he moves on to discuss the importance of understanding predestination in view of the fall of Adam:

“It is also vital to see predestination in light of the Fall. All Christians agree that God’s decree of predestination was made before the Fall. Some argue that God first predestinated some people to salvation and others to damnation and then decreed the Fall to make sure that some folks would perish. Sometimes this dreadful view is even attributed to Calvinism. Such an idea was repugnant to Calvin and is equally repugnant to all orthodox Calvinists. The notion is sometimes called ‘hyper-Calvinism.’ But even that is an insult. This view has nothing to do with Calvinism. Rather than hyper-Calvinism, it is anti-Calvinism” (p. 96).

Obviously God decreed the Fall that He might be glorified in the Person and Work of His Son (Ephesians 3:11; 1 Peter 1:20). And in order for God to show Himself truly gracious and truly merciful He unconditionally predestinated Jacob and Moses to salvation and unconditionally predestinated Esau and Pharaoh to damnation. God “*made sure*” that Esau and Pharaoh would perish by unconditionally hardening them (Romans 9:18). And He unconditionally hardened them because He desired to demonstrate His wrath and make His power known (Romans 9:22).

God also “*made sure*” that Jacob and Moses would be saved by unconditionally having mercy on them (Romans 9:18). He had unconditional mercy on them because He desired to make known the riches of His glory to them (Romans 9:23). The riches of His glory are made known to the vessels of mercy prepared for salvation when they see that the work of Jesus Christ ALONE is what makes them to differ from the vessels of wrath prepared for damnation. The vessels of mercy predestined to salvation are those for whom Christ DID die. The vessels of wrath predestined to damnation are those for whom Christ did NOT die. This God-glorifying, Christ-magnifying doctrine is what R.C. Sproul finds *dreadfully repugnant*.

“Then to you who believe belongs the preciousness. But to disobeying ones, He is the Stone which those building rejected; this One became the Head of the Corner, and a Stone-of-stumbling, and a Rock-of-offense to the ones

stumbling, being disobedient to the Word, to which they were also appointed” (1 Peter 2:7-8).

“God has not appointed us to wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, He dying on our behalf, so that whether we watch or we sleep, we may live together with Him” (1 Thessalonians 5:9-10).

Contrary to what Sproul says, God indeed “*makes sure*” that some folks stumble at the Stone-of-stumbling, having appointed them to wrath. God also “*makes sure*” that other folks believe, having appointed them to obtain salvation through their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

“When God predestines people to salvation he is predestinating people to be saved whom he knows really NEED to be saved. They need to be saved because they are sinners in Adam, not because he forced them to be sinners. Calvinism sees Adam sinning by his own free will, not by divine coercion” (pp. 96-97; emphasis Sproul’s, italicized in the original).

Sproul is COMMANDING the Potter. He is telling the Potter what He can and cannot do with His own things. Sproul is wickedly sympathizing with Paul’s objector. God did NOT “force” (the word “force” is infinitely too weak) anyone to be a sinner, He CAUSED them to be sinners. God actively, omnipotently, and efficiently CAUSED the Fall and this is how He makes dishonorable vessels. The objector asks God, “Why did You make me like this?” (Romans 9:20) Sproul’s reply is that God did NOT make him like this, but that he made himself like this by his own free will. Paul contradicts Sproul by saying that God DID make him like this because He has the sovereign right to make vessels of dishonor for the purpose of displaying His power and wrath.

The question is WHY did God make the objector into a sinful vessel to display His wrath in? Another way to put it (to employ Sproul’s terminology) would be:

“Why did you ‘force’ or ‘coerce’ me to be a sinner by making me like this?”

Paul’s objector asked “Why does He yet find fault?” (Romans 9:19) And just in case anybody missed it, R.C. Sproul is Paul’s objector.

Scripture says that God hardens whom He will. This is unconditional hardening on God’s part. Now think of the kind or type of “hardening” that God would have to do in order to evoke this kind of response on the part of the rebellious sinner. The objection is that if God hardens IN THIS MANNER (or in THIS WAY), then God cannot find fault with the one whom He is hardening.

According to Sproul’s scheme of things, those whom God hardens would NOT *NEED* to be saved since God would be “*forcing*” them to be sinners (i.e., making them like this). And if He is “*forcing*” them to be sinners by “making them like this” then they CANNOT be judged as sinners since He (supposedly) cannot find fault with them. With whom then, does the fault lie, if not with man? With God, of course. The enemies of God assert that if God “made them like this” in order to destroy them as a vessel of wrath then HE is the guilty One and not them since He “*forced*” or “*coerced*” them. Oh, the mutiny!

Sproul asserts that Adam sinned by his own free will and not by “*divine coercion*.” The truth is that Adam sinned because God actively caused him to sin. And as I’ve shown repeatedly, “*coercion*” doesn’t even come close to an accurate description of the Biblical teaching concerning Divine determinism. What Sproul is saying though, is that pre-fall Adam had a will that was *free from God’s control*. Thus, what Sproul is advocating here is a form of atheism or paganism.

“To be sure, God knew before the Fall that there would most certainly be a Fall and he took action to redeem some. He ordained the Fall in the sense that he chose to allow it, but not in the sense that he chose to coerce it. His predestinating grace is gracious precisely because he chooses to save people whom he knows in advance will be spiritually dead” (p. 97).

Sproul says that God ordained (decreed) the Fall in the sense that He “*chose to allow it.*” To Sproul, God “chose to allow it” because He knew that it would happen in advance. It looks like Sproul is twisting and perverting the Biblical teaching of an active decree into a “decree” (so-called) that is merely an expression of Divine prescience. Apparently in Sproul’s blinded mind, the Fall was “allowed to happen” in some sort of dualistic, deistic, or spontaneously generated fashion. Is there perhaps another sovereign creator in the universe that “chose to coerce it”?

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Spiritual Death and Spiritual Life: Rebirth and Faith

Chapter 5 is called “Spiritual Death and Spiritual Life: Rebirth and Faith.”

There is not a lot I want to comment on in this chapter except for a few things:

“Most Christians agree that God’s work of regeneration is a work of grace. The issue that divides us is whether or not this grace is irresistible” (p. 120).

Certain lost self-righteous religionists who misuse the name of Christ say that faith precedes regeneration. In this case regeneration is NOT a work of grace but a work of debt — this is “regeneration of debt” by the self-righteous work of the sinner. It is a blatant form of salvation by works and it is damnable heresy.

Sproul proceeds to discuss what he calls other “non-Reformed” views of regeneration. Specifically the view of “prevenient grace.” This is defined as a kind of “grace” that comes before something (p. 123). The non-Reformed view is that this “grace” is given to every sinner without exception and thus every sinner without exception is able to choose to believe in Christ for salvation by virtue of this sufficient prevenient “grace.” One reason for this aforementioned perversion of the Biblical concept of grace is that this view believes that Christ died equally for every sinner without exception. For a Biblical refutation of this particular “non-Reformed” view see these two articles, *Gospel Atonement* and *The Damnable Heresy of Arminianism*:

<https://agrammatos.wordpress.com/2009/10/10/gospel-atonement/>

<https://agrammatos.wordpress.com/2017/08/07/the-damnable-heresy-of-arminianism/>

Sproul’s primary pestilence in this chapter is that he calls these self-righteous advocates, “Christians” (p. 125)

## CHAPTER SIX

### Foreknowledge and Predestination

Chapter 6 is called: “Foreknowledge and Predestination.” I suppose the stand out passage in this chapter is the following:

“I have great appreciation for the foreknowledge view of predestination. I once held to it before I surrendered to the Reformed view. But I abandoned this view for several reasons. Not least is that I have become convinced that the foreknowledge view is not so much an explanation of the biblical doctrine of predestination as it is a denial of the biblical doctrine. It fails to include the whole counsel of God on the matter” (p. 130).

Perhaps one reason why Sproul has “great appreciation” for this God-denying view of predestination is because it differs little from the Reformed view of how

God is said to “passively decree” sinful actions. The Reformed position on the (alleged) “decree” of sinful actions is merely an expression of Divine prescience which is substantially no different than the non-Reformed view. This is not to say there haven’t been many concerted and vain attempts to evade this charge with various ridiculous, elaborate, and convoluted theories (e.g., efficacious permission, divine concursus, etc.).

Thus, the Reformed and non-Reformed alike DENY the very Godhood of God by their assertion that God does not actively decree sinful actions. Both positions necessarily imply that God has been “*sovereignly letting go of His sovereignty*” throughout most of human history since most of human history has been filled with sinful events, actions, and thinking.

Another reason for Sproul’s “great appreciation” could be due to the similarity expressed in both the Reformed and non-Reformed denials of salvation conditioned exclusively on the work of Jesus Christ. The non-Reformed denies salvation by the work of Jesus Christ alone by teaching that God saves sinners who fulfill certain conditions that He foresees them perform with “prevenient grace.” The Reformed denies salvation by the work of Jesus Christ alone by teaching that God saves sinners who fulfill certain conditions that He effectually enables and foreordains them to perform.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Double, Double, Toil, and Trouble: Is Predestination Double?

Sproul's Chapter 7 is called: "Double, Double, Toil and Trouble: Is Predestination Double?"

"There are different views of double predestination. One of these is so frightening that many shun the term altogether, lest their view of the doctrine be confused with the scary one. This is called the equal ultimacy view.

Equal ultimacy is based on a concept of symmetry. It seeks a complete balance between election and reprobation. The key idea is this: Just as God intervenes in the lives of the elect to create faith in their hearts, so God equally intervenes in the lives of the reprobate to create or work unbelief in their hearts. The idea of God's actively working unbelief in the hearts of the reprobate is drawn from biblical statements about God hardening people's hearts.

Equal ultimacy is NOT the Reformed or Calvinist view of predestination. Some have called it 'hyper-Calvinism.' I prefer to call it 'sub-Calvinism' or, better yet, 'anti-Calvinism.' Though Calvinism certainly has a view of double predestination, the double predestination it embraces is not one of equal ultimacy" (p. 142; emphasis Sproul's; italicized in the original).

The phrase "equal ultimacy" might mean different things to different people. However, the Biblical view of predestination is that God actively works in the hearts of the reprobate to hate His glory, persecute His people, and oppose His gospel, that He may justly punish them (Exodus 7:3, 9:12; Joshua 11:20; 1 Samuel 2:25; Psalm 105:25; Romans 9:18; Revelation 17:17). Sproul is correct to say, in effect, that the Reformed or Calvinist view of predestination is NOT the one taught in Holy Scripture. Indeed, it is clearly not. The Biblical teaching of predestination is indeed "anti-Calvinistic" because it is anti-sovereignty-of-man.

There is symmetry in the sense of God being equally active in BOTH decrees of election and reprobation, but obviously there is no symmetry in God's purpose for electing His people when compared with His purpose for reprobating the rest. There is no "equal ultimacy" in His dealings with the elect and reprobate since He has purposed to have mercy on the one and to harden the other.

"To understand the Reformed view of the matter we must pay close attention to the crucial distinction between positive and negative decrees of God. Positive has to do with God's active intervention in the hearts of the elect. Negative has to do with God's passing over the non-elect.

The Reformed view teaches that God positively or actively intervenes in the lives of the elect to insure their salvation. The rest of mankind God leaves to themselves. He does not create unbelief in their hearts. That unbelief is already there. He does not coerce them to sin. They sin by their own choices" (pp. 142-143).

In attempting to grasp the incoherent Reformed view one must make a distinction between “positive” and “negative” decrees. But we will not be lulled into this Sproulian stupor since the Bible makes no such “crucial” distinctions. God does “give men up” to impurity (Romans 1:24) and “allows nations to go their own way” (Acts 14:16) and the Assyrians present a salient instance of how God actually accomplishes this. The Assyrian kingdom was the rod of God’s anger sent to punish Jerusalem for its idolatry. R.C. Sproul would EVILLY BOAST that the Assyrian is being “left to himself” or “passed over” since it is in the Assyrian’s heart “to destroy and cut off nations not a few” (Isaiah 10:7). In reality the Assyrian is an unwitting instrument of wrath in the hand of God and R.C. Sproul is unwittingly sympathizing with the Assyrian king. The king and R.C. are BOTH like unto a sovereignty-denying staff that lifts (i.e., exalts) itself up as if it were not wood. When it comes to sinful actions done by them, R.C. Sproul and the king of Assyria are of the arrogant notion that the axe, the rod, and the staff are “permitted” to move under their own power, to swing themselves by their own self-determining steam.

Sproul says that the unbelief of the reprobate is “already there” and that God did not put it there. Really? Then how did it get there? Perhaps there is another Creator in the universe? Sproul insists on misrepresenting and caricaturing the Biblical position with the word “coerce.” A person who is being coerced is able to give at least some resistance. The alleged “coercing” (i.e., hardening) that God is doing in Romans 9:18 cannot be resisted (Romans 9:19). Sproul asserts that the reprobate ultimately “sin by their own choices.” Really? Is there another God in whom the reprobates live and move and exist (cf. Acts 17:28)? Is there another metaphysical power in the universe by which rods and axes swing themselves (cf. Isaiah 10)? If we were to read Sproul’s philosophical presumption into Psalm 105:25 it would read like this:

“He did NOT turn their hearts to hate His people. He left them to themselves. He did not create hatred in their hearts. It was already there. He did not coerce them to hate. They sinned by turning their own hearts.”

Sproul writes:

“The dreadful error of hyper-Calvinism is that it involves God in coercing sin. This does radical violence to the integrity of God’s character. The primary biblical example that might tempt one toward hyper-Calvinism is the case of Pharaoh” (p. 143).

A great way to marginalize the Biblical teaching is to give it a disparaging and inaccurate label (e.g., “hyper-Calvinism”). Earlier Sproul had described the Biblical view as “anti-Calvinistic,” which is true. The basic, elementary, and Scriptural teaching concerning the Godhood of God is extremely anti-Calvinistic. No doubt about it. Paul’s belligerent objector also thought that unconditional active hardening did “radical violence to the integrity of God’s character.” For “Why does He yet find fault?” implies that the fault ought to lie with the One who hardened him and made him like this (Romans 9:20). Sproul’s concern for the integrity of God’s character is a transparent façade. Sproul has his very own standard that he imposes upon God. Evidently God must adhere to Sproul’s standard of righteousness lest He do radical violence to the integrity of His own character. Sproul seeks to shroud self-worship with the robe of reverence.

“The Bible clearly teaches that God did, in fact, harden Pharaoh’s heart. Now we know that God did this for his own glory and as a sign to both Israel and Egypt. We know that God’s purpose in all of this was a redemptive purpose. But we are still left with a nagging problem. God hardened Pharaoh’s heart and then judged Pharaoh for his sin. How can God hold Pharaoh or anyone else accountable for sin that flows out of a heart that God himself hardened? Our answer to that question will depend on how we understand God’s act of hardening. How did he harden Pharaoh’s heart? The Bible does not answer that question explicitly. As we think about it, we realize that basically there are only two ways he could have hardened Pharaoh’s heart: actively or passively” (p. 144).

Sproul asks “How can God hold Pharaoh or anyone else accountable for sin that flows out of a heart that God himself hardened?” This is the SAME idea expressed in the question of Paul’s God-hating objector (Romans 9:19). Sproul says that our answer to the question of how God can find fault with the one He hardens depends on how we understand God’s act of hardening.

The Reformed view of passive hardening when correctly understood NEVER receives the Romans 9:19 objection. The only reason the Reformed position ever receives the objection is because many of the “non-Reformed” misunderstand it and confound it with the Biblical view. If God is not actually hardening people but merely passively allowing them to harden themselves, then the objection in Romans 9:19 would never come up. In Romans 9:20 Paul shows that the objector has correctly understood the doctrine of God’s unconditional immediate and efficient hardening of Pharaoh.

Paul’s rhetorical questions clearly demonstrate that those among the hardened reprobate have no right to talk back to God; no right to command the Potter since He has the right to make them reprobates (Romans 9:21). Please compare the answer Paul gives with the answer that Sproul gives. The contrast will prove striking.

“Active hardening would involve God’s direct intervention within the inner chambers of Pharaoh’s heart. God would intrude into Pharaoh’s heart and create fresh evil in it. This would certainly insure that Pharaoh would bring forth the result that God was looking for. It would also insure that God is the author of sin.

Passive hardening is a totally different story. Passive hardening involves a divine judgment upon sin that is already present. All that God needs to do to harden the heart of a person whose heart is already desperately wicked is to ‘give him over to his sin.’ We find this concept of divine judgment repeatedly in Scripture” (pp. 144-145).

Evidently the “inner chambers of Pharaoh’s heart” is a kind of “Holy of Holies” that

God dare not intrude into lest He sully His righteous character. Though Sproul does not explicitly define what he means by the phrase “author of sin” it is at least implied that God would be doing “radical violence” to His character by virtue of this “intrusion.” Sproul invents a standard of his own making and then has the audacity to impose it upon God.

Either Sproul believes God COMMITS the actual sin He CAUSES or that God is SINS when He CAUSES a person to commit the actual sin. Both of these ideas are nefarious *non sequiturs* to say the least — God does NOT become Pharaoh by CAUSING Pharaoh to sin. Nor does God sin when He CAUSES Pharaoh to sin. Apparently R.C. has just come down off his Sproulian Sinai with some freshly-etched tablets for God to obey.

In light of Sproul’s doctrine of passive hardening Romans 9:18 would read thusly: “So, then, to whom He desires, He shows mercy. And to whom He desires, He gives over to his sin.” In the pernicious view of passive hardening there is no reason to ask, “Who resists His will?” since there is nothing actively being done on God’s part that could not be resisted by the one being hardened. And of course, the answer given by the Apostle Paul in Romans 9:20 is that God DID make him like this. Sproul contradicts God’s apostle by saying that God did NOT make you like this. You made yourself like this.

“How does this work? To understand it properly we must first look briefly at another concept, God’s common grace ...One of the most important elements of common grace we enjoy is the restraint of evil in the world...By his grace he controls and bridles the amount of evil in this world. If evil were left totally unchecked, then life on this planet would be impossible.

All that God has to do to harden people’s hearts is to remove the restraints. He gives them a longer leash. Rather than restricting their human freedom, he increases it. He lets them have their own way. In a sense he gives them enough rope to hang themselves. It is not that God puts his hand on them to create fresh evil in their hearts; he merely removes his holy hand of restraint from them and lets them do their own will” (p. 145).

When Sproul asks “How does this work?” he is asking how does “passive hardening” work? Of course passive hardening fits together quite well with the insidious view of “common grace” which teaches either that God shows grace at the expense of His justice or that Jesus Christ’s death in some way merited grace for everyone without exception.

Sproul is advocating a kind of semi-dualism where there is an independent power that can be increased or decreased by God, but yet is nevertheless free from His active control. Sproul makes the asinine assumption that if evil were “left totally unchecked” then life on the planet would be impossible. Really? I thought the Bible taught that God was actually IN CONTROL.

Sproul’s adherence to “common grace” reveals that he is ignorant of the fact that God does not show grace at the expense of His justice. He is also ignorant that God desires to actively cause many reprobates to be outwardly moral. Away with such hypothetical nonsense about “restraint” and “life on this planet.” There is absolutely nothing to “check” or “restrain” in the way Sproul describes. God needs to restrain, bridle, and check the evil of men as much as a woodsman needs to restrain, bridle, and check the swinging of an axe (cf. Isaiah 10:15). Which is to say, not at all.

According to the heretic R.C. Sproul the less God restrains the less He controls, and the more God restrains the more He controls. For Sproul, the more God withdraws his “restraining grace” the more the reprobate sovereignly controls his own thoughts, words, and actions. Sproul says that God does not restrict human freedom, but increases it. Thus the more God withdraws “restraining grace” the more sovereign the creature becomes. It is by virtue of this “restraining grace” that God gives up much of His sovereignty to the creature.

“About the only restraint there was on Pharaoh’s wickedness was the holy arm of God. All God had to do to harden Pharaoh further was to remove his arm. The evil inclinations of Pharaoh did the rest.

In the act of passive hardening, God makes a decision to remove the restraints; the wicked part of the process is done by Pharaoh himself. God does no violence to Pharaoh's will. As we said, he merely gives Pharaoh MORE freedom... We see the same kind of thing in the case of Judas... Judas was not a poor innocent victim of divine manipulation. He was not a righteous man whom God forced to betray Christ and then punished for the betrayal. Judas betrayed Christ because Judas wanted thirty pieces of silver... To be sure, God uses the evil inclinations and evil intentions of fallen men to bring about his own redemptive purposes. Without Judas there is no Cross. Without the cross there is no redemption. But this is not a case of God coercing evil" (pp. 146-147; Sproul's emphasis is italicized in the original).

Sproul says that the "evil inclinations of Pharaoh did the rest." In Sproul's blinded estimate, Pharaoh must be the ultimate metaphysical cause of his own actions. This is nothing but atheism in religious garb. God did NOT give Pharaoh "more freedom" any more than He gave the Assyrian king more freedom (Isaiah 10:5-15); or any more than He gave Amaziah more freedom (2 Chronicles 25:20); or any more than He gave certain hate-filled people more freedom (Psalm 105:25); or any more than He gave the king's heart more freedom (Proverbs 21:1); or any more than He gave His "war club" more freedom to wreak havoc upon the nations (Jeremiah 51:20-26).

Obviously the mighty God of war and holy vengeance is NOT "passively" swinging His war club by giving it "more freedom." The war club's "freedom" is restricted by Him who wields it.

"In God's ultimate act of judgment he gives sinners over to their sins. In effect, he abandons them to their own desires. So it was with Pharaoh. By this act of judgment, God did not blemish his own righteousness by creating fresh evil in Pharaoh's heart. He established his own righteousness by punishing the evil that was already there in Pharaoh.

This is how we must understand double predestination. God gives mercy to

the elect by working faith in their hearts. He gives justice to the reprobate by leaving them in their own sins” (pp. 147-148).

Roughly translated Sproul is saying that in God’s ultimate act of judgment He serves up a heaping portion of His sovereignty to reprobate sinners. In Sproul’s twisted mind, for God to do this is “a kind of poetic justice” (p. 147). Certainly the Bible teaches a kind of “poetic justice” whereby God gives men up to their own sin. But this is always done actively, never passively.

God did NOT leave Pharaoh in his own sins; He actively hardened Pharaoh by working the rebellion of unbelief in his heart. The Sproulian Calvinist will say, “Why then does God find fault with Pharaoh? For who among the reprobate can possibly resist God’s will to harden him?” I answer with the Apostle that God has the right to make dishonorable vessels, to make men sinners in order to show His power and wrath against them and to utterly destroy them. God DID make them “like this” (i.e., did make them sinners; dishonorable vessels) but they have no right to object any more than the pot has the right to object to the potter.

“The second objection Paul anticipates is this: ‘You will say to me then, Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?’ Again we wonder why the apostle anticipates this objection. This is another objection never raised against Arminianism. Non-Reformed views of predestination don’t have to worry about handling questions like this” (p. 152).

The apostle anticipates this objection because he is teaching unconditional reprobation and active hardening. Sproul (and other like-minded Calvinists) would say that God finds fault because He did NOT make the objector like this. In stark contrast Paul says that God DID make the objector like this and he has no right to complain to God by saying, “Why did You make me like this?” Paul is saying that to object to God making you like this is as warped as a pot complaining to the potter. Thus, Reformed views of predestination don’t have to worry about handling questions like this since they do NOT believe that God made the dishonorable

vessels. In answer to Romans 9:20 most Reformed answer: “The one formed shall not say ‘why did You make me like this?’ because He didn’t make you like this.” But Paul contradicts the Reformed world in Romans 9:21 by answering in the affirmative — God DID make you like this and He has the authority to make you like this.

Sproul quotes Romans 9:20-24 and comments:

“This is a heavy answer to the question. I must confess that I struggle with it. My struggle, however, is not over whether the passage teaches predestination. It clearly does that. My struggle is with the fact that this text supplies ammunition for the advocates of equal ultimacy. It sounds like God is actively making people sinners. But that is not required by the text. He does make vessels of wrath and vessels of honor from the same lump of clay. But if we look closely at the text we will see that the clay with which the potter works is ‘fallen’ clay” (p. 153).

Sproul struggles with it because he is suppressing the truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18). Romans 9:20-24 “sounds like” God is actively making people sinners because it is clearly teaching that God is actively making people sinners. Why else would Paul say, “Shall the thing formed say to the One forming it, Why did You make me like this?” if he was not intending to teach that God actually made them like this? Sproul wishes to assert that the clay is “fallen clay.” Paul’s teaching is that God MAKES the dishonorable vessels. Sproul’s teaching is that the dishonorable vessels somehow MAKE themselves.

In discussing the doctrine of unconditional election Sproul writes:

“We must be careful to distinguish between conditions that are necessary for salvation and conditions that are necessary for election. We often speak of election and salvation as if they were synonymous, but they are not exactly the same thing. Election is UNTO salvation. Salvation in its fullest sense is the complete work of redemption that God accomplishes in us. There are all

sorts of conditions that must be met for someone to be saved. Chief among them is that we must have faith in Christ. Justification is by faith. Faith is a necessary requirement. To be sure, the Reformed doctrine of predestination teaches that all the elect are indeed brought to faith. God insures that the conditions necessary for salvation are met. When we say that election is unconditional we mean that the original decree of God by which he chooses some people to be saved is not dependent upon some future condition in us that God foresees” (pp. 155-156; emphasis Sproul’s, italicized in the original).

Sproul clearly and succinctly states his opposition to the gospel of salvation conditioned on the atoning blood and imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ alone (cf. 1 John 2:22). According to Sproul God’s unconditional choice is not dependent upon future conditions whether foreseen or foreordained. Sproul’s view is that election is unconditional, but with regard to salvation there are “all sorts of conditions that must be met.”

To Sproul, salvation (not election) is dependent NOT on Christ ALONE but on conditions foreordained that God infallibly “insures” will be met. To repeat, Sproul’s teaching is that salvation is ultimately dependent, NOT upon the efficacious work of Jesus Christ alone, BUT upon the work of the “god-enabled” sinner to meet all the supposed multitudinous conditions for salvation (cf. 1 John 4:1-3).

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Can We Know that We are Saved?

In chapter 8 (“*Can we know that we are saved?*”) Sproul addresses the topic of the assurance of one’s salvation. He mentions one of the “crucial questions” of D. James Kennedy’s “ministry,” *Evangelism Explosion*:

“The first is, ‘Have you come to the place in your spiritual life where you know for sure that when you die you will go to heaven?’ Experienced workers say the vast majority of people answer this question in the negative. Most people are not sure of their future salvation. Many, if not most, raise serious doubts about whether such assurance is even possible.

When I was in seminary, a poll was taken of my classmates. Of that particular group of seminarians approximately 90 percent said that they were not sure of their salvation. Many expressed anger at the question, seeing in it a kind of implied presumptuousness. It seems arrogant to some people even to talk about assurance of salvation” (p. 163).

Those doubting seminarians expressed anger at the “*implied presumptuousness*” because they believe that salvation, at least in part, depends on their own efforts at religion and morality (cf. Romans 9:30-32; 10:3).

Interestingly those who initially expressed anger would most likely concede that it is possible for one to *\*arrive eventually\** at an assurance that is not presumptuous. Evidently to them assurance based on “the sure and certain promise of God

through the work of Jesus Christ alone” (CCF, V.C.6.) is presumption, while assurance based on so-called “*graciously enabled*” obedience to the law and continued repentance is not presumption.

Apparently they would be angered with the teaching that “God gives every believer assurance of salvation” (CCF, V.C.6.) as an immediate and inevitable fruit of regeneration, but they would NOT be angered with the teaching that assurance is obtained, maintained, or regained by establishing a righteousness of their own as part of the grounds of acceptance before God (cf. Romans 10:1-4). In short, they have not assurance of salvation because they have not faith in Christ (for more, see the article [“Faith is Assurance”](#)).

“With respect to the assurance of salvation there are basically four kinds of people in the world. (1) There are people who are not saved who know that they are not saved. (2) There are people who are saved who do not know that they are saved. (3) There are people who are saved who know that they are saved. (4) There are people who are not saved who ‘know’ that they are saved.

It is the last group that throws a monkey wrench into the works. If there are people who are not saved who ‘know’ that they are saved, how can the people who are saved know that they really are saved?

To answer that question we must first ask another question. Why do some people have a false assurance of their salvation? Actually it is relatively easy. False assurance stems chiefly from false understanding of what salvation requires or entails” (pp. 163-164).

Sproul asserts that there “are people who are saved who do not know that they are saved.” Sproul not only contradicts Romans 8:16, he also opens a floodgate that enables all sorts of people into the Kingdom apart from knowledge and belief of the gospel (cf. Romans 1:16-17; 10:1-4). Ironically false assurance comes from Sproul’s teaching of assurance based on works. And Sproul’s teaching of assurance based on works stems chiefly from a false understanding of what

salvation requires or entails. R.C. Sproul (and those who believe like him) are stumbling at the Stone of stumbling. They misunderstand the function of the law of God — which is NOT a means of working up a self-righteous assurance of salvation, but a means of resting in a Substitute who met in full (“It is finished!”) all that salvation requires and entails (Galatians 3:24).

“God requires perfection to get into his heaven. We either find that perfection in ourselves or we find it somewhere else, in someone else. If we think we can find it in ourselves, we delude ourselves and the truth is not in us” (p. 166).

Those who doubt their salvation are seeking to find a righteousness in themselves that will give them assurance of entrance into His heaven (cf. Romans 10:1-4).

“We can have a proper understanding of what salvation is and still delude ourselves about whether or not we meet the requirements of salvation. We may think that we have faith when in fact we have no faith. We may think that we are believing in Christ but the Christ we embrace is not the biblical Christ. We may think that we love God but the God we love is an idol” (p. 167).

The above contradicts the teaching of Scripture which says things like, “I know in Whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that day” (1 Timothy 1:12) and that it is impossible for the regenerate sheep to follow a false shepherd (John 10:1-5). Ironically for Sproul he has NOT “embraced” the Biblical Christ and the “god” he loves is a less-than-sovereign idol.

Sproul, commenting on 2 Peter 1:10-11, asserts the following:

“There are many Christians who are indeed in a state of salvation who lack

assurance. To be lacking in assurance is a grave hindrance to spiritual growth. The person who is not sure of his state of grace is exposed to doubts and terrors in his soul. He lacks an anchor for his spiritual life. His uncertainty makes him tentative in his walk with Christ” (p. 168).

Sproul, with cavalier hands, takes hold of the rock of 2 Peter 1:10-11 in a futile attempt to wring the blood of self-righteous endeavor out of it (cf. Romans 10:3). He erroneously thinks that the elect of God make their calling and election sure by means of establishing their own righteousness.

The apostle Paul teaches that true Christians have NOT received a spirit of bondage again to fear, but a Spirit of Adoption. Sproul forcefully contradicts the God-inspired apostle. Sproul says further that some true Christians lack an anchor. But God through the writer to the Hebrews says the exact opposite:

“This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus” (Hebrews 6:19-20).

Sadly Sproul teaches the repugnant notion that the Christian’s faith can at times be anchored in his own self-righteous navel rather than perpetually anchored in the One who enters and intercedes for them in the Holy of Holies.

Sproul commenting on Psalm 51:

“If we read his prayer of confession in Psalm 51 we can hear the lament of a man who is struggling to regain his assurance ... The saints have called it the ‘dark night of the soul’” (p. 172).

Sproul reads his pseudo-pious Puritan Reformed nonsense into the text. David’s plea to God for renewal of a steadfast spirit and for not taking His Holy Spirit from him is for the purpose of restoring the joy, NOT the assurance of God’s salvation

(vs. 10-12).

Sproul asked in the subheading “*Can we lose our salvation?*,” and proceeds with the following:

“We have already stated that it is possible to lose our assurance of salvation. That does not mean, however, that we lose the salvation itself” (p. 173).

When you think about it there is much similarity between the Arminians who affirmed actual loss of salvation to the truly regenerate (see Conference of Remonstrants 11/7), and Calvinists like Sproul who affirm that only assurance of salvation can be lost. These Remonstrants believed that a truly regenerate person could fall away into eternal reprobation because they believed in salvation conditioned on their own efforts. Similarly those who lose assurance of salvation do so because they too, believe that salvation is conditioned on their own efforts. They become “*more and more assured*” as they do more and more works or conquer more and more sins. Their bold assurance to enter into the Holiest (if or when they obtain assurance) comes NOT from the blood of Jesus Christ ALONE, but from their own self-righteous supposedly “*graciously-enabled*” endeavors (cf. Hebrews 10:19).