

# “THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

## God’s Sovereignty and Free Will

By Stan Cox

Earlier this week I came across a website critiquing the “restoration movement.” This particular author was writing from a Calvinist’s point of view, and was very critical of the three “sects”, the Christian Church, the Disciples of Christ, and the Church of Christ. He accused members as being theistic humanists, because of their “Arminian” belief in “so-called free will.” He claimed that although progress has been made, these denominations still had not discovered the grace of God.

I would like to respond.

**First**, I would note that I and my brethren have no association or affiliation with either the Disciples of Christ or the Christian Church. Though we share history, few in the denominations understand the premise of the movement to restore New Testament Christianity, and I have yet to read of a fair and accurate assessment of the efforts made in that regard in the 19th century. Too, the Disciples of Christ denomination has completely disregarded the principle of restoration, and the slightly more conservative Christian Church is not far behind. As Paul revealed in 1 Corinthians 3:1-4, the carnal practice of appealing to the authority of men brings sectarianism. In contrast, our Lord revealed *“the truth shall make you free”* (Jn. 8:31).

**Second**, the writer is correct in noting that Calvinism has made inroads into the church. It is pervasive in the more liberal institutional churches, and I have seen and heard its subtle influence in the language of young Christians who are perhaps vulnerable to the influence of the religious denominations around us. The distinctiveness of gospel preaching, once championed by Christians, is now a frequent target of criticism as misguided brethren seek to conform to what is considered a more “orthodox” theology, championed by a majority of protestants.

**Third**, the claim that members of the Lord’s church have not discovered the grace of God is not only defamatory, it is absurd. Gospel preachers always have and always will preach the truth that we are *“saved by grace”* (cf. Eph. 2:8). No man can earn his own salvation, for the simple reason that “all have sinned” (cf. Rom. 3:23). What we reject is the flawed Calvinistic concept of grace that is remarkably similar to the view Paul condemned in Romans 6:1-2, *“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”*

**Finally**, we reject the absurd concept of God’s sovereignty that was popularized by a 27 year old, only six years removed from Roman Catholicism. Calvin wrote his first edition of his Institutes of the Christian Religion at that age in 1536. He believed that the concept of sovereignty required God to be solely responsible for a man’s salvation or condemnation. Each man was individually predestined to salvation or condemnation by God before the world began. This concept was the foundation of Calvin’s theology. If this view of sovereignty is so, then free will is illusory. If it is flawed, then the entire system fails.

Flawed it is, which is evident from a cursory reading of scripture. While the Calvinist holds to the view that man can have no impact on his own salvation, as it is foreordained before creation; the scripture clearly reveals that there are numerous things that a man may or may not “do”, which will impact his eternal standing. For example, it is evidently absurd to deny free will in the face of Mark 16:16, *“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”* When the gospel is preached (vs. 15), each man must decide (free will) whether he will believe or not. Another example of choice is clearly intimated in Paul’s sermon on Mar’s hill. *“Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all*

**men everywhere to repent”** (Acts 17:30). To repent or not to repent, that is the (free will) question. The fact that some mocked Paul, but others believed, indicates two different choices were made.

The Calvinist’s concept of God’s sovereignty makes Him unfair and capricious. He predetermines a man’s destiny, regardless of any efforts on the man’s part to live righteously. The reality is that God is fair, rewarding those who choose to live righteously, and punishing those who choose to disobey Him (cf. 2 Thess. 1:3-10).

This fairness was clearly shown by God in his dealings with Israel, despite their objections. Consider Ezekiel 18:25-27):

***“Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not fair.’ Hear now, O house of Israel, is it not My way which is fair, and your ways which are not fair? When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity, and dies in it, it is because of the iniquity which he has done that he dies. Again, when a wicked man turns away from the wickedness which he committed, and does what is lawful and right, he preserves himself alive.”***

The sovereign God of heaven determined in His sovereignty to punish the wicked and reward the righteous. He did this because He is good and just. He also determined in His sovereignty to extend His favor by sending His Son to die in our stead. He did this because He is merciful. Because He is sovereign, He has the right to treat man in this way. Because He is good, just and merciful, He can not treat man unfairly — a truth John Calvin failed to grasp. – ***Sound Teaching***, October 23, 2015. ■

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## SCRIPTURE ALONE

By John Edwards

It has been suggested, “The Bible does not teach the doctrine of Sola Scriptura (Scripture alone).” A reading of a few passages of Scripture should identify this as a false statement.

**1) THE SCRIPTURES ARE COMPLETE.** Paul penned, ***“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works”*** (2 Tim. 3:16-17). If man may be perfect or complete by the Scriptures, then the Scriptures must be complete. My faith in the inspiration and all-sufficiency of the Scriptures does not rest upon any human council, but upon the testimony of God-inspired men.

**2) WE ARE WARNED AGAINST GOING BEYOND THE SCRIPTURES.** Some have tried to add various books to the Scriptures. Many have gone beyond the Scriptures in their teaching and practice. Paul warned, ***“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed”*** (Gal. 1:8). John recorded, ***“Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God...”*** (2 Jn. 9). Heaven’s greatest blessings rest upon those who leave the Scriptures alone, while Heaven’s greatest condemnation belongs to those who are not content with Scripture alone (Rev. 22:18-19). Since the Scriptures are complete, and we are warned against going beyond the Scriptures, our whole faith, teaching and practice must rest upon Scripture alone. How can anyone disagree? – ***The Terre Haute Speaker***, September 15, 2019. ■

***“For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book”*** (Rev. 22:18-19).

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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