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THE BAPTIST HERITAGE

APRIL 20, 2004

Theology by Penknife

Though the passage is familiar, do not make the mistake of assuming that you already *know* what is written. I made that mistake and I sincerely regret doing so. Please read the following verses carefully, giving special attention to the words that I have underlined. The paragraphs are those found in the Cambridge edition of the Authorized Version.

Jeremiah 36

1 And it came to pass in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, *that* this word came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, 2 Take thee a roll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee against Israel, and against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spake unto thee, from the days of Josiah, even unto this day. 3 It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin. 4 Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah: and Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the LORD, which he had spoken unto him, upon a roll of a book. 5 And Jeremiah commanded Baruch, saying, I *am* shut up; I cannot go into the house of the LORD: 6 Therefore go thou, and read in the roll, which thou hast written from my mouth, the words of the LORD in the ears of the people in the LORD'S house upon the fasting day: and also thou shalt read them in the ears of all Judah that come out of their cities. 7 It may be they will present their supplication before the LORD, and will return every one from his evil way: for great is the anger and the fury that the LORD hath pronounced against this people. 8 And Baruch the son of Neriah did according to all that Jeremiah the prophet commanded him, reading in the book the words of the LORD in the LORD'S house.

9 And it came to pass in the fifth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, in the ninth month, *that* they proclaimed a fast before the LORD to all the people in Jerusalem, and to all the people that

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this and that

Editor and Staff

Jerald L. Manley J. Alan Wolf Gary Roland

Correction, if needed

The following sentence in last month's article was misunderstood to equate Peale and Schuler with Norris, Jones, and Wilson, etc. "The granddisciples (I coined that word to represent the 'spiritual' grandchildren) of Norman Vincent Peale, the offspring of Robert Schuler are leading this huge parade and, unbelievably, the supposed 'spiritual' grandchildren and great-grandchildren of J. Frank Norris, John R. Rice, Robert Ketchum, W. B. Riley, T. T. Shields, Bob Jones Sr., Noel Smith, Dallas Billington, Art Wilson, Joe Henry Hankins, B. R. Lakin, and a host of others are marching in step and keeping rank." *Please take note of the words "unbelievably, the supposed 'spiritual.'"*

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I intend to accuse some who claim to be spiritual descendents of those good men of having accepted the false philosophy of Peale and Schuler. The Baptist preachers that I named opposed those unbiblical teachers and their true spiritual descendents would do the same. If my sentence continued too long and caused confusion, I apologize.

—Pastor Manley

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pensationalist—proposing a progression of kinds of salvation, a covenant theologian—eliminating Israel and touting kinship salvation, or a cultist—off on an array of wild, wide excursions into heresy.

1 Corinthians 1

19 For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. 20 Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

May God give us a resurgence of simple Bible believers, who are content to believe what God has revealed. Believers who do not assume that they can confine the eternal Godhead into their neat, rational systems of logic.

—Pastor Manley

The February article on predator preachers engendered a wide range of response. While the "tone" of the article was challenged (whatever the individual meant by "tone remains undefined), the responses from causalities bore tragic witness to the continuing ungodly activities of ungodly men posing as spiritual leaders.

Among the contacts was information about a program to help victims. Those counseling with victims of sexual abuse and those who are being or have been abused might wish to use this web site for assistance.

www.Titus2MenAndWomen.org

Their child abuse section is <http://www.titus2menandwomen.org/ChildAbuse/index.shtml>

The March article on the differences between Baptists now and in the 1950's is being reprinted in booklet form by Bro. James Stevens. (Contact him at brojstevens@juno.com for information.)

Our desire is to do what we can with what we have. Feel free to make use of our efforts if you can.

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because revelation does not require reconciliation; revelation is received or rejected, not reconciled.

The common consensus among conservative Bible scholars is that the oldest written Book of the Bible is Job. The Book of Job is too often ignored when the subject of theology is discussed. The Book has a rather strongly developed presentation of doctrine, including a Genesis (creation) to Revelation (resurrection and judgment) scope. The Book of Job gives no comfort either to Bullinger (and company) or to Calvin; Arminius is not consoled either. Determinate fatalism is repudiated by Job, not encouraged by the Book.

One need not move beyond either Job or the first three chapters of Genesis to enter the field of conflict with Calvinism or with Arminianism. Either Adam had the freedom to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or he had no choice but that he would eat. Having eaten, he was entirely dependent upon the intervention of God; he retained no ability to achieve and to maintain righteousness. The battle is engaged at the "Hast thou eaten?" The conflict with Scripture does not cease until that last "whosoever will" of the Revelation.

22: 17 And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

The dilemma never departs—"whosoever will" is a valid invitation to be accepted or rejected or it must be explained away, redefined, or removed by a new text. Unbelievable as it might seem, all three solutions have been proposed in this generation by scholars following the theology of the penknife. As for me, I choose to let the words stand as they are. I refuse to follow the theologians of the penknife. By the way, any decent dictionary will inform you that "whosoever" is the emphatic form of "whoever"; therefore, you should never use any translation that dares to remove the emphasis on the invitation to whoever will come to come. The "so" is so important that it is worth whatever fight is required to keep in the text.

The illogic of a logical approach to Scripture will always compel the logistician to manufacture a theological system by the use of a scribal penknife. The result will always be a Calvinist—rejecting the free will of man, an Arminian—despising the sovereignty of God, a dis-

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came from the cities of Judah unto Jerusalem. 10 Then read Baruch in the book the words of Jeremiah in the house of the LORD, in the chamber of Gemariah the son of Shaphan the scribe, in the higher court, at the entry of the new gate of the LORD'S house, in the ears of all the people. 11 When Michaiah the son of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, had heard out of the book all the words of the LORD, 12 Then he went down into the king's house, into the scribe's chamber: and, lo, all the princes sat there, even Elishama the scribe, and Delaiah the son of Shemaiah, and Elnathan the son of Achbor, and Gemariah the son of Shaphan, and Zedekiah the son of Hananiah, and all the princes. 13 Then Michaiah declared unto them all the words that he had heard, when Baruch read the book in the ears of the people. 14 Therefore all the princes sent Jehudi the son of Nethaniah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Cushi, unto Baruch, saying, Take in thine hand the roll wherein thou hast read in the ears of the people, and come. So Baruch the son of Neriah took the roll in his hand, and came unto them. 15 And they said unto him, Sit down now, and read it in our ears. So Baruch read it in their ears. 16 Now it came to pass, when they had heard all the words, they were afraid both one and other, and said unto Baruch, We will surely tell the king of all these words. 17 And they asked Baruch, saying, Tell us now, How didst thou write all these words at his mouth? 18 Then Baruch answered them, He pronounced all these words unto me with his mouth, and I wrote *them* with ink in the book. 19 Then said the princes unto Baruch, Go, hide thee, thou and Jeremiah; and let no man know where ye be.

20 And they went in to the king into the court, but they laid up the roll in the chamber of Elishama the scribe, and told all the words in the ears of the king. 21 So the king sent Jehudi to fetch the roll: and he took it out of Elishama the scribe's chamber. And Jehudi read it in the ears of the king, and in the ears of all the princes which stood beside the king. 22 Now the king sat in the winterhouse in the ninth month: and *there was a fire on the hearth burning before him.* 23 And it came to pass, *that* when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth. 24 Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, *neither* the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words. 25 Nevertheless Elnathan and Delaiah and Gemariah had made intercession to the king that he would not burn the roll: but he would not hear them. 26 But the king commanded Jerahmeel the son of Hammelech, and Seraiah the son of Azriel, and Shelemiah the son of Abdeel, to take Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet: but the LORD hid them. 27 Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, after that the king had burned the roll, and the words which Baruch wrote at the mouth of Jeremiah, saying, 28 Take thee again another roll, and write in it all the former words that were in the first roll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah hath burned. 29 And thou shalt say to Jehoiakim king of Judah, Thus saith the LORD; Thou hast

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burned this roll, saying, Why hast thou written therein, saying, The king of Babylon shall certainly come and destroy this land, and shall cause to cease from thence man and beast? 30 Therefore thus saith the LORD of Jehoiakim king of Judah; He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost. 31 And I will punish him and his seed and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring upon them, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and upon the men of Judah, all the evil that I have pronounced against them; but they hearkened not. 32 Then took Jeremiah another roll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah; who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire: and there were added besides unto them many like words.

This appalling story of the frightful arrogance of the King of Judah is told so clearly and so plainly that it does not need my elaboration. To the child of God the image of a haughty man, be he king or peasant, using a penknife to slice and dice the word of God is so abhorrent as to be unconscionable. (Interestingly, Merriam Webster's Thesaurus gives 'outrageous' among its synonyms for "unconscionable" and then specifies that unconscionable is outrageous in the sense of being "barbarous, unchristian, uncivilized, ungodly, unholy, [and] wicked." No preacher could possibly say it better than that.) Surely, every preacher has decried Jehoiakim, the wicked son of godly Josiah, and his ungodly use of this penknife. The image of a man that is rebellious to the extent that he may be found cutting out of the scroll of the word of God those portions that he finds personally offensive has lent itself to many a pulpit use. The application of this audacity to the current social war to make homosexuality a respectable alternative lifestyle is an obvious example. The blatant rejection of specific biblical commands on the grounds of outdated social relevance or an outmoded cultural setting is a striking example of theology by penknife.

I confess, however, that I had continually misread this Scripture until this very week. Unfortunately, I developed the picture of King Jehoiakim using *his own penknife* to do the deed. I know what a penknife is—I even own one. A penknife is a small, usually one-bladed knife, that a *city gentleman* carries. More often than not, the penknife is expensive and delicate, designed with style rather than utility for its purpose. A *country boy* grows up with a jackknife, which is nei-

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really true. Maybe I'm not saved after all."

I went to my room and began to read the Bible. On my knees I said, "Well, here I am. I can't point to my obedience. There's nothing I can offer. I can only rely on Your atonement for my sins. I can only throw myself on Your mercy." Even then I knew that some people only flee to the Cross to escape hell, not out of a real turning to God. I could not be sure about my own heart and motivation. Then I remembered John 6:68. Jesus had been giving out hard teaching, and many of His former followers had left Him. When He asked Peter if he was also going to leave, Peter said, "Where else can we go? Only You have the words of eternal life." In other words, Peter was also uncomfortable, but he realized that being uncomfortable with Jesus was better than any other option.

R. C. Sproul, *Assurance Of Salvation*, (Table Talk, November 6, 1989)

I repeat my statement: "No Calvinist believes in the security of the believer." The Calvinist only believes in the security of the elect. Therefore, my friend, do not call yourself a Calvinist or Calvinistic because you believe in the depravity of humanity or because you believe in the security of the believer. *What the Calvinist believes is not what you believe.*

When the Calvinist is confronted with the obvious fact that John Calvin was an innovator in his theology, the usual retort is that Calvin simply 'rediscovered' the teachings of St. Augustine. However, when the spotlight focuses on Augustine (with his serious doctrinal deviations), the Calvinist declares that Augustine was just continuing in the lineage of Pauline theology all along. I maintain that if Calvinism 'originated' with Paul, it is still an innovation. Theology begins; it must begin, in Genesis. Biblical theology did not begin with Paul—and neither did salvation by grace (I am sorry; I should have given the followers of Bullinger, O'Hare, and Stam more of a warning.) Moses recorded Genesis; he was, however, not the "originator" of Biblical theology. Moses recorded the revelation of God.

Biblical Theology begins to be revealed in Genesis 1:1 and remains consistent through Revelation 22:21. Moses and Paul were not Calvinists—they both believed in human responsibility and human choice. They did so even as both proclaimed the sovereignty of God. They accepted the free will of humanity and the sovereignty of God *because both truths are the revelation of God.* Neither Moses nor Paul devoted a single verse to an attempt of reconciling these dual truths

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dwell in darkness, the LORD is a light for me. I will bear the indignation of the LORD because I have sinned against Him, until He pleads my case and executes justice for me. He will bring me out to the light, and I will see His righteousness." Micah 7:8-9

WE MUST OFTEN WAIT PATIENTLY FOR THE RETURN OF ASSURANCE. "I waited patiently for the LORD; and He inclined to me and heard my cry. He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay, and He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God; many will see and fear and will trust in the LORD." Psalm 40:1-3

ASSURANCE IS A FIGHT TO THE DAY WE DIE. "Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life." 1 Timothy 6:12 "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith." 2 Timothy 4:7

(Forgive me; I must interrupt again here to marvel that he wrenches two verses from their context to support his Calvinist position as he implies that no one has assurance *until he or she is dead and in Heaven*. That level of assurance offers no comfort whatever. The question always remains as to whether or not one is in the elect.)

ASSURANCE IS FINALLY A GIFT OF THE SPIRIT. "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God." Romans 8:16 "The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself.... And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son." 1 John 5:10-11
Longing for your assurance,
Pastor John

Dr. Piper is not the only Calvinist to admit his difficulty with obtaining assurance ad who anchors assurance to personal introspection and persevering works. Notable Calvinist writer R. C. Sproul pointedly admitted:

A while back I had one of those moments of acute self-awareness that we have from time to time, and suddenly the question hit me: "R.C., what if you are not one of the redeemed? What if your destiny is not heaven after all, but hell?" Let me tell you that I was flooded in my body with a chill that went from my head to the bottom of my spine. I was terrified.

I tried to grab hold of myself. I thought, "Well, it's a good sign that I'm worried about this. Only true Christians really care about salvation." But then I began to take stock of my life, and I looked at my performance. My sins came pouring into my mind, and the more I looked at myself, the worse I felt. I thought, "Maybe it's

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ther dainty nor stylish, in his pocket. Multi-bladed and most utilitarian, the jackknife is carried for use and not appearance. Country boys also learn about "trappers," "stockmen," "congress," "sowbellies," and "butterbeans"; they also know the difference between the "Bowie" and the "Texas toothpick," the "skinner," and the "guthook." Therefore, I pictured this King reaching into his front pocket and taking out his favorite stag-handled, gold pinned, (Case or Boker, undoubtedly), damascened bladed penknife and daintily slicing the scroll into pieces. However, this is not at all what happened, even though I remember Dr. John R. Rice verbally painting just such a picture. The text clearly describes the event. Dr. Rice and I were guilty of reading the text as if it occurred within our frame of reference. We read into the text our own experiences—that is never the safest or best practice. While in this case the action did not seriously affect the doctrine or the events of the scene, it did cause me to miss the full implication of what is here. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia provides this fascinating information:

In Jeremiah 36 Baruch, the son of Neriah, declares that he recorded the words of the prophet with ink in the book. In Jeremiah 36:23 it says that the king cut the roll with the penknife (literally, the scribe's knife). This whole scene can best be explained if we consider that Baruch and the king's scribes were in the habit of using reed pens. These pens are made from the hollow jointed stalks of a coarse grass growing in marshy places. The dried reed is cut diagonally with the penknife and the point thus formed is carefully shaved thin to make it flexible and the nib split as in the modern pen. The last operation is the clipping off of the very point so that it becomes a stub pen. The Arab scribe does this by resting the nib on his thumb nail while cutting, so that the cut will be clean and the pen will not scratch. The whole procedure requires considerable skill. The pupil in Hebrew or Arabic writing learns to make a pen as his first lesson. A scribe carries a sharp knife around with him for keeping his pen in good condition, hence, the name penknife. (all underlining mine—Pastor Manley)

Do you now "get the picture"? Dr. Rice and I (I mention him to make my error *walk in good company*. That is the Baptist preacher way of doing things, is it not?) simply read the passage and defined "penknife" as we thought it should be, instead of following the actual meaning. We used our own "private definition." That is not proper Bible exegesis; I certainly regret doing so.

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Jehoiakim, king of Judah, used *the penknife of a scribe* to whittle the Scriptures down to the size he deemed appropriate. It was not his penknife, expensive and fancy; it was the utilitarian, commonly employed penknife of the scribe, the person charged with faithfully copying the Scriptures (or the words of the king—either way, this scribal knife was used this time in a dishonorable, unfaithful way). The delicate everyday tool of the scribe, designed to prepare his pen for careful work of transcribing, was transformed into a “butcher knife” to transmute the word of God into cast-away fuel for the fire. By this perverted use of the knife of the scribe, the word of God was mutilated. In the passage, the King on the Throne of Heaven had a ready remedy for the impudent actions of the king on the throne of Israel. The theology of the penknife was countered by the protecting watch-care of the Author of the words. Almighty God confounded the work of both king and scribe by his power and insured that His words were faithfully preserved and not willfully or carelessly discarded.

The great American Statesman, Thomas Jefferson, revered almost to sainthood by the masses as the man who wrote the Constitution of the United States—that magnificent document that is to American conservatives and has become, to some American Bible believers, the most perfect document ever written by mere man—was a practitioner of the “Jehoiakimian” School of Theology. He literally used his blade to create “The Jefferson Bible,” from the Four Gospels. He sliced out all that was miraculous and supernatural—anything that could describe or declare Jesus of Nazareth to be the Son of God. The Jehoiakimian-Jeffersonian theologians of today are legion, for “they are many.” With the scribal penknife, in the name of the advance of knowledge, the growth of culture, or a fresh archaeological discovery, many a Jehoiakim-Jeffersonian Baptist scholar or cleric writes, preaches, or lectures Scriptural words, phrases, verses, and entire passages into oblivion, slicing them out of the text of Scripture and casting them into the fires of scholarship or societal evolution.

Not all who practice the theology of the penknife are bold enough to mimic Jehoiakim and Jefferson in the literally scissoring of Scripture, though increasingly more are. More devious, indirect methodology has been devised to allow the penknife of the scribe to cut in many ways. Jehoiakim and Jefferson were brazen and open in their

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Helping People Have the Assurance of Salvation
August 5, 1999

FULL ASSURANCE IS GOD'S WILL FOR US. “And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end.” Hebrews 6:11

(Forgive me for interrupting, but I am stunned at how this Calvinist will declare “the will of God” and then devote a full page to proving that “God’s will for us” cannot be achieved in our lifetime. Read on—he offers no way for anyone to be certain that he or she is in the elect this side of heaven.)

ASSURANCE IS PARTIALLY SUSTAINED BY OBJECTIVE EVIDENCES FOR CHRISTIAN TRUTH. “To [his [sic] apostles] [sic] He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days.” Acts 1:3

ASSURANCE CANNOT NEGLECT THE PAINFUL WORK OF SELF-EXAMINATION. “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?” 2 Corinthians 13:5

ASSURANCE WILL DIMINISH IN THE PRESENCE OF CONCEALED SIN. “When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.” Psalm 32:3

ASSURANCE COMES FROM HEARING THE WORD OF CHRIST. “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” Romans 10:17

“These have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.” John 20:31

REPEATED FOCUSING ON THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE CROSS OF CHRIST IS CRUCIAL FOR ASSURANCE. “Since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.” Hebrews 10:21-22

WE MUST PRAY FOR EYES TO SEE THE TRUTHS THAT SUSTAIN ASSURANCE. “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.” Ephesians 1:18-19

ASSURANCE IS NOT EASILY MAINTAINED IN PERSONAL ISOLATION. “And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you.’” 1 Corinthians 12:21

ASSURANCE IS NOT DESTROYED BY GOD'S DISPLEASURE AND DISCIPLINE. “Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy. Though I fall I will rise; though I

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faith, we should tackle the problem of assurance another way. We should begin by realizing that there is an objective warrant for resting in God's forgiveness of my sins, and there is a subjective warrant for God's forgiveness of my sins. The objective warrant is the finished work of Christ on the cross that "has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14). The subjective warrant is our faith which is expressed in "being sanctified."

Next we should realize that saving faith has two parts. First, faith is a spiritual sight of glory (or beauty) in the Christ of the gospel. In other words, when you hear or read what God has done for sinners in the cross and the resurrection of Jesus, this appears to your heart as a great and glorious thing in and of itself even before you are sure you are saved by it. I get this idea from 2 Corinthians 4:4, where Paul says that what Satan hinders in the minds of unbelievers is the "seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." For faith to be real there must be a supernatural "light" that God shines into the heart to show us that Christ is glorious and wonderful (2 Corinthians 4:6). This happens as a work of the Spirit of God through the preaching of the gospel.

Second, faith is a warranted resting in this glorious gospel for our own salvation. I say "warranted resting" because there is an "unwarranted resting" - people who think they are saved who are not, because they have never come to see the glory of Christ as compellingly glorious. These people only believe on the basis of wanting rescue from harm, not because they see Christ as more beautiful and desirable than all else. But for those who "see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" their resting is warranted.

What this means practically is that we should continually look to the cross and the work of God in Christ, because this is where God makes the light of the gospel shine. Secondly, we should continually pray for God to "enlighten the eyes of our hearts" (Ephesians 1:18). Thirdly, we should love each other, because, as John said, "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren." In the end, assurance is a precious gift of God. Let us pray for each other that it will abound among us.

Seeing and resting,
Pastor John

In material written the following year, Dr. Piper continued the theme with this unhelpful advice. He does not reference the version used, and I did not bother to trace the source. It is his writing and not mine; besides the texts often do not address the heading he has given them.

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carving and remodeling of the word of God into a volume acceptable to their perverted minds. The penknife theologians today are more devious and less honest. Today's Jehoiakimian-Jeffersonian does not even consider that he is tampering with the Scriptures; his claim is that his efforts are devoted to producing a 'more accurate,' 'nearer to the original,' 'more relevant to the contemporary reader,' and, therefore, 'better' version—one that gives the 'real intent' of the original writers. The approach may be more sophisticated; but the result remains mutilation of the text with the penknife of a scribe.

Very commonly today, the scribal penknife is wielded to create a new text to replace the old. The Scriptures are defaced, in sequential stages, by "scissors-and-paste" techniques of textual criticism. Scholarship, intellectual attainment, ascends the throne and, with bold impudence removes this word and substitutes that word, deletes this verse, rearranges that passage, and challenges the confidence of still another. Scribes become editors and then are transformed unannounced into authors. The person in the pew is quickly sold into bondage, existing at the mercy of the professional linguist. How dares the unlearned layperson to challenge the professional who declares, "The original said"? Believers are denied their priesthood and relegated as mere "initiates" who are dependent upon those 'priests' with a superior relationship with truth—in simple terms: believers are made to come to the mediator of scholarship. The presumptuous scribe assumes the robes of the priestly class and the believer becomes a groveling disciple of man—the slave of an arrogant mediator.

After a single, solid generation of such skullduggery, Contemporary church attendees no longer carry a Bible. In the first place, there is no need for a Bible in such churches because the preacher does not read more than is necessary to give him an excuse to say whatever he intended to say. Secondly, in order to keep up with the speaker as he refers to the Bible, the average church attendee would need at least an NIV, an NKJV, an NASV, a CEV, The Message, and an NLT, since there is no assurance as to which translation or paraphrase the Contemporary communicator will be using on any given day. Besides, most likely, whatever rendition the host uses, it will be flashed upon the screen anyway. A people who do not carry a Bible to church and diligently use it to do as did the disciples of Berea and check what the preacher claims that the Bible says against what the Bible actually

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says are a people who are "tossed with every wind of doctrine" and led by "by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive"—that is the sad, but accurate description of most Baptists today. Could it be that the real reason that some preachers use so many versions is to keep the congregation dependent upon *them* instead of upon the word of God?

The propagation of an ever evolving new and different text—which is exactly what every new translation of Scripture of the last one hundred fifty years has been—is not the only use of the scribe's penknife. Contemporary scribes, as were the historical variety, are notorious for the use of secret definitions and of contrived allegorical explanations. Words are selectively redefined. Without the knowledge of that key, truth, of course, cannot be known. Since one may only obtain the "key" through the anointed scribe, the rank and worth of that scribe increases and so does his power. A people who surrender their priesthood to the pulpit (*or, more accurately today, the stage!*) are a people that are easily led into error. The word of God was not given by God exclusively to scholars, but to the people of God. The Bible was never intended to be parceled out by the scholar, but to be held and read by the believer. The Sacred Book was never given as the exclusive property of any priestly class. In the most emphatic tone that I know, I affirm that I do not believe that "the head of some Church" was ever entrusted with the commission to be the protector or defender of the faith or the preserver of the Scriptures. God entrusted the word to "them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ" and charged them to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints." Jude was not written to a denomination or an institution of learning. Jude is addressed to believers comprising local churches. When those believers cease contending for the faith, the church they attend will apostatize and the educational agencies they support will produce heretics. When the preacher in the pulpit, the communicator on the stage, or the professor in the class usurp the right of the believer to have and to read the word of God *without the need of a mediating interpreter*, the believer needs to rise in holy indignation and reject the interloper. When the words are arbitrarily altered by the device of secret or selective definitions or when contrived allegorical explanations

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evidence of "true" belief, while issuing continual warnings against confidence in the flesh and reminding the individual of the real possibility of self-deception. Again, do not take my word for this. Consider the remarks of well-known, best-selling author, Dr. John Piper. In material reprinted with his permission (and which drones on without getting to the issue—but which I will print completely so as not to provide the excuse that I took something out of context), he states: (The underlining is mine to focus attention on his convoluted reasoning of focusing all on the personal life of the individual.)

The Agonizing Problem of the Assurance of Salvation

April 28, 1998

The most agonizing problem about the assurance of salvation is not the problem of whether the objective facts of Christianity are true (God exists, Christ is God, Christ died for sinners, Christ rose from the dead, Christ saves forever all who believe, etc.). Those facts are the utterly crucial bedrock of our faith. But the really agonizing problem of assurance is whether I personally am saved by those facts.

This boils down to whether I have saving faith. What makes this agonizing - for many in the history of the church and today - is that there are people who think they have saving faith but don't. For example, in Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus says, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles? And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.'"

So the agonizing question for some is: do I really have saving faith? Is my faith real? Am I self-deceived? Some well-intentioned people try to lessen the problem by making faith a mere decision to affirm certain truths, like the truth: Jesus is God, and he [sic] died for my sins. Some also try to assist assurance by denying that any kind of life-change is really necessary to demonstrate the reality of faith. So they find a way to make James 2:17 mean something other than what is [sic] seems to mean: "Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead." But these strategies to help assurance backfire. They deny some Scripture; and even the minimal faith they preserve can be agonized over and doubted by the tormented soul. They don't solve the problem, and they lose truth. And, perhaps worst of all, they sometimes give assurance to people who should not have it.

Instead of minimizing the miraculous, deep, transforming nature of faith, and instead of denying that there are necessary life-changes that show the reality of

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the Saints" will be found these comments.

Article 9

Of this preservation of the elect to salvation and of their perseverance in the faith, true believers themselves may and do obtain assurance according to the measure of their faith, whereby they surely believe that they are and ever will continue true and living members of the Church, and that they have the forgiveness of sins and life eternal.

Article 10

This assurance, however, is not produced by any peculiar revelation contrary to or independent of the Word of God, but springs from faith in Gods promises, which He has most abundantly revealed in His Word for our comfort; from the testimony of the Holy Spirit, witnessing with our spirit that we are children and heirs of God (Rom. 8:16); and lastly, from a serious and holy desire to preserve a good conscience and to perform good works. And if the elect of God were deprived of this solid comfort that they shall finally obtain the victory, and of this infallible pledge of eternal glory, they would be of all men the most miserable.

Article 11

The Scripture moreover testifies that believers in this life have to struggle with various carnal doubts, and that under grievous temptations they do not always feel this full assurance of faith and certainty of persevering. But God, who is the Father of all consolation, does not suffer them to be tempted above that they are able, but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that they may be able to endure it (1 Cor. 10:13), and by the Holy Spirit again inspires [sic] them with the comfortable assurance of persevering.

Article 12

This certainty of perseverance, however, is so far from exciting in believers a spirit of pride, or of rendering them carnally secure, that on the contrary it is the real source of humility, filial reverence, true piety, patience in every tribulation, fervent prayers, constancy in suffering and in confessing the truth, and of solid rejoicing in God; so that the consideration of this benefit should serve as an incentive to the serious and constant practice of gratitude and good works, as appears from the testimonies of Scripture and the examples of the saints.

If you carefully read these statements, then you must observe as do I that Calvinism rests assurance upon the foundation of "observing in themselves." The assurance that the Calvinist teaches is not based upon a confidence held in the actual knowledge that one is the elect of God or in the fulfillment of the promise of God; instead, the Calvinist teaches the convert to observe and "feel" in himself the

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are substituted for simple truths, the word of God becomes the bartering property of the one with the 'knowledge.'

I am a simple preacher with a simple approach. It has even been said that I have a simple mind. My mother taught me to read before I started the first grade. Concurrently with learning to read, she also instilled in me the concept that words have meanings and that I was not free to make a word mean whatever I might think it should mean. I am grateful for my mother in many respects and high among those is her gift of disciplined reading.

In the simplicity that my mother taught me, I approach Scripture with the understanding that the words are established (already written and not subject to my editing) and that each word has its meaning and that I am not free to assign definitions that are special or secret to me. My mother never raised a Gnostic. A Gnostic is one that is "an adherent of Gnosticism," which is one who believes that "matter is evil and that emancipation comes through gnosis," which is the "esoteric knowledge of spiritual truth" or truth that is "designed for or understood by the specially initiated alone" [Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary]. The person who is persuaded that he or she has been shown by one of superior knowledge the true meaning, the secret definition, the special understanding that is available only for a selected, chosen few is a Gnostic at heart. No one is born as a Gnostic; Gnostics come by induction, not by reproduction, duplicating through instruction, not through regeneration. They do, however, come in a range of sizes and in various denominations—all wearing varying "knock-offs" of "sheep's clothing."

The first appeal of this philosophical approach is to the pride of the possession of an elect position and of intellectual superiority. Scholars debate as to when the Gnostic infiltration of Christianity actually began; I will leave that debate to scholars, who are deservedly well above my pay-grade. I simply know that the Gnostic philosophy is easily observed as alive and well in the Old Testament and is thriving in contemporary American theologians. The desire to have special knowledge of a special vocabulary to understand the special truth that is available only to special individuals lies behind the success of cults and false religions; that desire always leads to special trouble. Perhaps the most subtle of all Gnostic flavored Christianity is that sys-

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term of Christianity that is popularly called Calvinism and typically identified as the theology of the TULIP: Total depravity—Unconditional election—Limited atonement—Irresistible grace—Perseverance of the saints.

I remember being a fringe participant in a particular discussion in the old Snack Shop at Bob Jones University. The intellectual giants of the campus were holding court on the glories of Calvinism. For quite some time, I was privileged to listen as the secrets of “Irresistible Grace” and “Unconditional Election” were unfolded. The doctrine of the predetermined steps of my life (*and all the others gathered around that table*) was pronounced with firm authoritative tones. After awhile, my simple mind got the message. The dawning of the light broke over my beclouded brain and I understood that the brethren were advocating the doctrine that the will of God was irresistible, irrevocable, and irresistible. They were confidently asserting that whatever God determined to be would be and would be without any intervention on the part of humanity. I understood this to mean that when God wills whatever He wills that will, which He wills, will be accomplished without any possibility of alteration, adaptation, or failure. I saw that the term predestination as they were using it meant irrevocably determined. Listening for several minutes and waiting for a pause (since my mother also taught me to be polite), when opportunity came, I stood up and said, “You do not believe in the deity of Jesus Christ and I am leaving.” When it was demanded that I explain my ‘ridiculous’ charge, I gave this analogy. “You tell me that whatever God wills, He will accomplish that will and that no man can prevent God from doing His will. Is that right?” Assured that it was; I then said, “Obviously then, you do not believe in the deity of Christ. The LORD Jesus said, ‘O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!’ He would; they would not—obviously, according to you, He could not be God.” When there was no response from my scholarly friends, I left. I have found nothing since then in the teachings of John Calvin to cause me to reconsider my simple evaluation of forty years ago.

To this day, no proponent of Calvinism has ever given me a similar response.

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any assurance that you *truly* believed? Perhaps, instead of having a genuine, *true* belief, you have a *belief of believing* that is a self-deception because you are one who will eventually prove to be of the tares rather than of the wheat since you will not persevere to the end. Your apparent believing today is no evidence that you have accepted the Gospel. After all Judas, Simon the sorcerer, and multiplied others ‘apparently’ believed, only to be shown later not to have *truly* believed.

Contrary to their carefully worded assertions, regardless of their skillful manipulation of Scripture, and despite their tedious redefining of terminology, whenever Calvinists speak of assurance, it is always with a caveat. However, take not my word alone for this. I submit the following statements from that rubric of Calvinism: The Canons of Dort. Under the title of “First Head of Doctrine Divine Election and Reprobation,” two articles are listed touching upon assurance of salvation. The underlining is mine to call attention to the caveat. These are somewhat tedious in reading. I could have excerpted the pertinent phrases, but I did not wish to be charged with tampering with the evidence.

Article 12

The elect in due time, though in various degrees and in different measures, attain the assurance of this their eternal and unchangeable election, not by inquisitively prying into the secret and deep things of God, but by observing in themselves with a spiritual joy and holy pleasure the infallible fruits of election pointed out in the Word of God such as, a true faith in Christ, filial fear, a godly sorrow for sin, a hungering and thirsting after righteousness, etc.

Article 13

The sense and certainty of this election afford to the children of God additional matter for daily humiliation before Him, for adoring the depth of His mercies, for cleansing themselves, and rendering grateful returns of ardent love to Him who first manifested so great love towards them. The consideration of this doctrine of election is so far from encouraging remissness in the observance of the divine commands or from sinking men in caral security, that these, in the just judgment of God, are the usual effects of rash presumption or of idle and wanton trifling with the grace of election, in those who refuse to walk in the ways of the elect.

Under the title, the “Fifth Head of Doctrine The Perseverance of

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countability, then there is no responsibility. If there is no responsibility, then there is no faith and "without faith it is impossible to please God."

Of those five pillars (mentioned above) supporting the superstructure of the theology of John Calvin, two are acceptable as to terms, but are corruptly defined by Calvin in such a way as to make them unacceptable. The other three are unscriptural in the very terms that are used. The Bible certainly declares the totality of the depravity of all humanity. "There is none righteous, no not one." However, the Calvinist defines total as meaning "inability." This is carried so far by the Calvinist as to teach that regeneration occurs before faith may be exercised. The elect are 'born again' before they believe. To the unlearned sitting in the pew listening to the Calvinist pontificate on the sovereignty of God, this distinction is lost. The terminology is appropriate but the understanding of the Calvinist requires the very basic meaning of the words to be redefined. That is theology by penknife.

Calvinism is the hope-so theology of the helpless. Powerless, dependent, unable to be involved—what terms could more adequately describe the situation of any person if the system of the Calvinist were to be true? The Calvinist paints humanity as helpless—destined to heaven or hell but unable to have any say in the matter, and most of all, unable to enlist the aid of the God of Heaven.

The Calvinist hopes that he or she is one of the elect, but is absolutely hopeless when it comes to ever knowing whether or not this is so. No one, under Calvinism, has an ability to be certain that he or she is numbered among the elect until the person is already in eternity. No Calvinist can ever say, as did the apostle Paul, with any confidence of personal application, "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." The Calvinist can only hope so.

"That is not true!" responds the Calvinist. "I know that I am one of the elect, because I have believed."

Is that really so? Did the act of believing make you one of the elect?

"Certainly not!"

Then, I must ask how does *your belief that you believed* give you

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ple answer to the dilemma Matthew 23:37 (or Luke 13:34) poses to "Unconditional Election" and "Irresistible Grace." I have found Matthew 23:37 to be the passage that no Calvinist will accept as written in any extant Greek text (of whatever stream). Without exception, every submitted proposed solution to the quandary that I proposed has involved changing the words of the text, redefining the words as they would normally be understood, or the introduction of a contrived Aramaic text of Matthew produced by the imagination of quite obviously overpaid scholars. The problem for the Calvinist is that having defined the will of God as a determinate election that is unconditional and a coercive grace that is irresistible and unavoidable, this verse, Matthew 23:37, shows the will of Jesus of Nazareth being "out-willed" by those in Jerusalem who reject Him. Either He dictatorially willed them to be gathered under His wings unconditionally, unavoidably, and irresistibly or He did not. No amount of slick-handed word sharking can change this. It is undeniable that He willed them to be gathered—it is also self-evident that He did not do so unconditionally, unavoidably, and irresistibly. In Matthew 23:37, the will of sinful human beings "over-wills" the will of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. Whatever else that might be involved in this contest of wills, the final decision was not predestined.

While many describe themselves as Calvinists, not wishing to be identified as an Arminian because they do indeed believe in the security of the believer, they do so wrongfully. The fact is that *no Calvinist believes in the security of the believer.* I repeat, "No Calvinist believes in the security of the believer." Before you have a stroke from high blood pressure, carefully think through what you just read. To save you the energy of looking backwards, I will repeat the statement again, "No Calvinist believes in the security of the believer." This is incontestable, regardless of what is claimed by some. Assertions notwithstanding, the Calvinist believes in the security of the elect—not of the believer.

As far as the Calvinist is concerned, a person can believe for sixty years and if that person is not one of the elect, that individual has no security—because he has no salvation. Not being within the bounds of the "LIMITED ATONEMENT," that individual must and will spend eternity in the Lake of Fire. Believing is not the issue with the Calvin-

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ist; believing is never a concern with the Calvinist. The only question the Calvinist ever considers is the election of God. If a person is elected, that soul, to the Calvinist, will be saved regardless of believing. (In fact, the Calvinist teaches regeneration is required *before* believing is possible.) True enough, the elect, in the Calvinistic scheme, will always turn out to be believers; but those who are not of the elect and who believe, do not “truly” believe. Believing is never the issue—the issue is always election. The person has no obligation or responsibility to believe, because, in effect, there is no opportunity to believe. All things are within the election of God. It is, to borrow a term from my father, “all cut and dried before it is planted.”

Think the matter carefully through. *IF*, as the Calvinist affirms, one person is elected by God to eternal life and will receive that gift of eternal life at the pre-established time and another is elected by God to eternal damnation and will be cast into the eternal Lake of Fire at the foreordained time and both are predestined to the assigned destiny without any obligation or responsibility of either individual to respond, *THEN* there is no need for any individual ever to have any concern as to whether or not he or she is one of the elect. The election is over and certified. No votes are remaining to be cast. The individual can neither accept nor reject, exercising a choice, because there is no option left to the individual. I understand that some Calvinists declare with a straight face that God only elects the righteous and that the unrighteous elect themselves, since God made the election because God knew in eternity past that if they were offered the choice that they would reject it. That kind of circuitous reasoning works in Washington politics, but it will not stand in Biblical theology. Calvinism requires that the Godhead be defined as a playwright, an actor, and a director, while the individual is merely reading the assigned part at the designated time, in the directed place, and must do so without any artistic liberty.

Someday, I intend a point-by-point parallel of the systems of John Calvin and Jacob Arminius to show that, in reality, either one is merely a reaction to the other. One places all the emphasis on God; the other puts the entire responsibility on the individual. For example, consider two statements that I recorded above with only a slight word modification. “As far as the Arminian is concerned, a person can

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believe for sixty years and if that person is not faithful to the end, that individual has no security and will spend eternity in the Lake of Fire. Believing is not the issue with the Arminian; the only issue is the faithfulness of the person.” The one system has God as the Supreme Dictator; the other portrays God as the Wimp of the Ages. The one makes humanity robots; the other structures humanity as “Sovereign.” The one makes God a dictator and the other confines God as a supplicant. Both constructions are equally unscriptural. The word of God clearly declares that God is sovereign and every individual is responsible. That may not be logical, but it is the revelation of God.

John Calvin, Jacob Arminius and the followers of both make the terrible mistake, the totally unnecessary miscalculation, of trying to reason revelation into some neat logical system comprehensible to humanity—not all humanity, but intellectual humanity. Revelation is not capable of being reasoned—it is not “*reason able*”—it is accepted or it is rejected. Grace, mercy, and love defy reason. Grace, mercy, and love are not logical pursuits. Hearts that desire to know the unknowable are filled with an intellectual pride. Systems (such as Covenant Theology and Dispensational Theology, with all the permutations of the two, or Calvinism and Arminianism, and the various “point” groupings of the two) quickly assume the preeminence. Scripture is sculptured to fit the particular system. The trimming, whittling, squeezing, molding, and conforming processes are amazing to behold. Square pegs do not fit into round holes. The body of Scripture will not be shaped by the girdles designed by either Calvin or Arminius.

Trying to explain the incomprehensible is a feckless adventure. Divine revelation is not subject to human explanation; revelation is received or rejected, believed or denied. The ability to reason to a logical conclusion the “whys and wherefores” of revelation is not within the power of the human mind. Revelation is not logically acquired. Revelation requires faith. Faith requires responsibility. Responsibility requires accountability. Accountability requires opportunity. Opportunity requires an alternative. An alternative requires the freedom to do or not to do. Unless there is freedom, there is no alternative. If there is no alternative, then there is no opportunity. If there is no opportunity, then there is no accountability. If there is no ac-

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