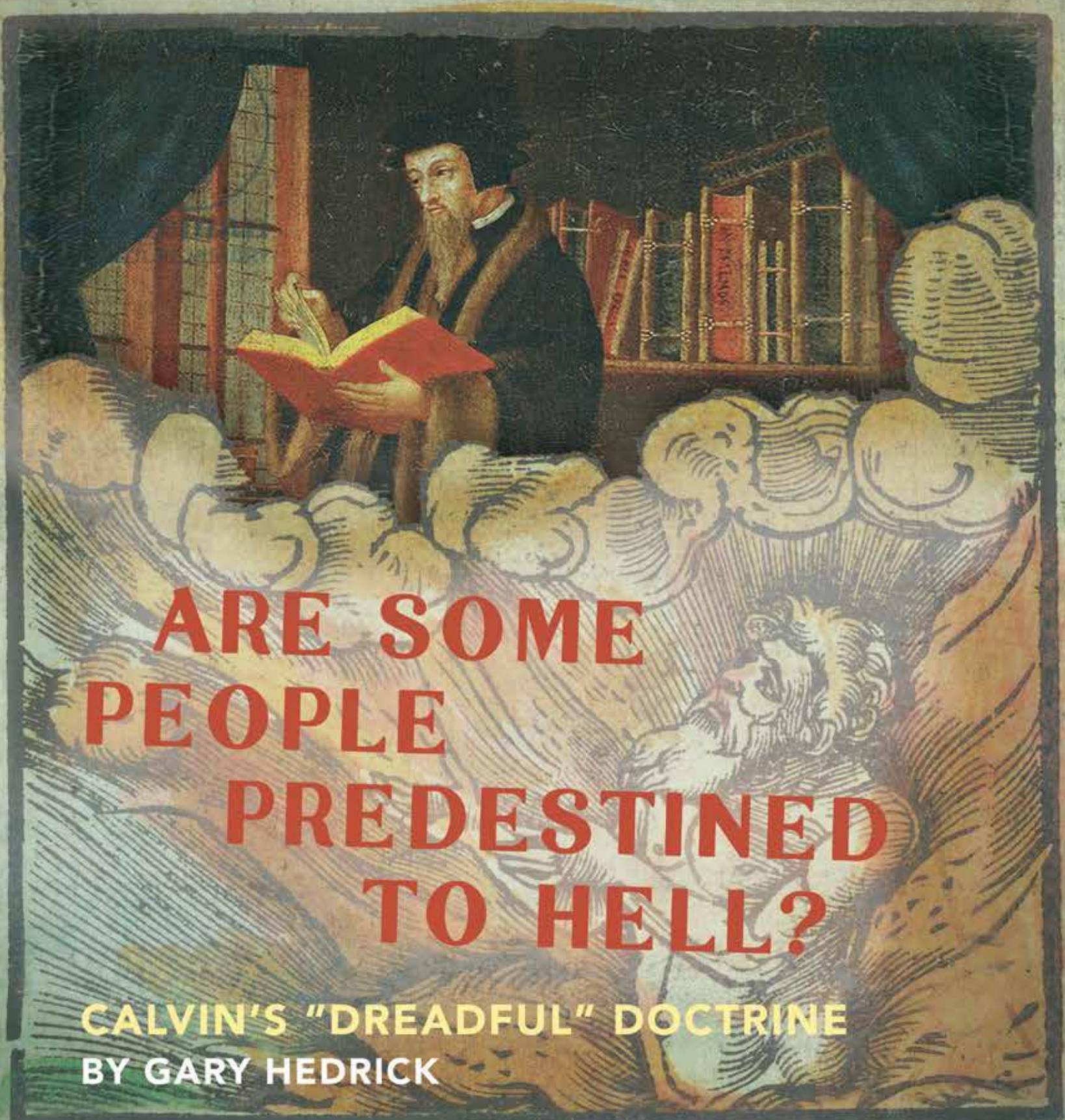




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Messianic Perspectives[®]

God has not forgotten the Jewish people, and neither have we.



**ARE SOME
PEOPLE
PREDESTINED
TO HELL?**

**CALVIN'S "DREADFUL" DOCTRINE
BY GARY HEDRICK**

In this third installment of our series on the fast-growing New Calvinist/New Reformed movement, and the teachings of many of its proponents, we explore the tenet of “reprobation”—a traditional Reformed doctrine that Calvin himself described as “dreadful.”

CHARLES HALFF (1929–2000), OUR FOUNDER, began his spiritual journey (from traditional Judaism to Messianic faith) as an Arminian. He was closely associated with the Assemblies of God (AOG) in the late 1940s and early 50s. An AOG family had taken him in as a teenager, when his Jewish *mishpochah* banished him from the home because he wouldn’t recant his faith in Yeshua (Jesus). Some kind-hearted Pentecostal folks gave him a place to live while he made the adjustment to being on his own. They loved him dearly, and he felt the same way about them.



He preached his first sermon in their AOG church on a Sunday night. They helped him get back on his feet when he experienced his family crisis. Right up to the day he died, Charles had a soft spot in his heart for Pentecostal people. He never forgot how good they had been to him.

The more he studied his Bible, though, the more he found himself identifying less with Arminianism and more with Reformed Baptist teaching.

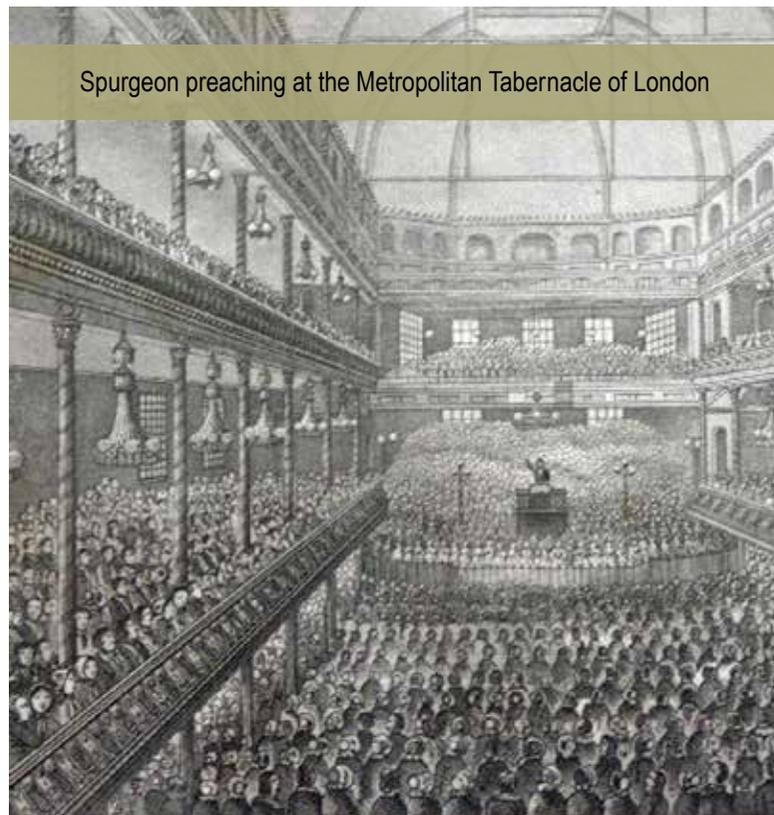
A preacher friend in Fort Worth suggested that he begin studying the works of Charles H. Spurgeon. It was a life-changer for this young Jewish preacher. As he pored over volumes of sermon transcripts from the famous Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, Charles found that he had a strong affinity for Spurgeon’s moderate and balanced Reformed philosophy. The “Prince of Preachers” stood uncompromisingly for the fundamentals of the historic Reformed faith, including biblical Predestination and eternal security; and he was also strongly evangelistic.

By this time, Charles was preaching mostly in Baptist and independent, non-denominational churches.



Charles Halff is shown here with Betty Burnaman Spangler during their reunion at our office circa 1998. Betty’s late father, Luther Burnaman, was a friend and mentor of Charles in the late 1940s. The Burnamans took him in and gave him a place to live while he made the adjustment to being on his own. This was the first time Charles and Betty had been together since they were both teenagers.

Spurgeon preaching at the Metropolitan Tabernacle of London



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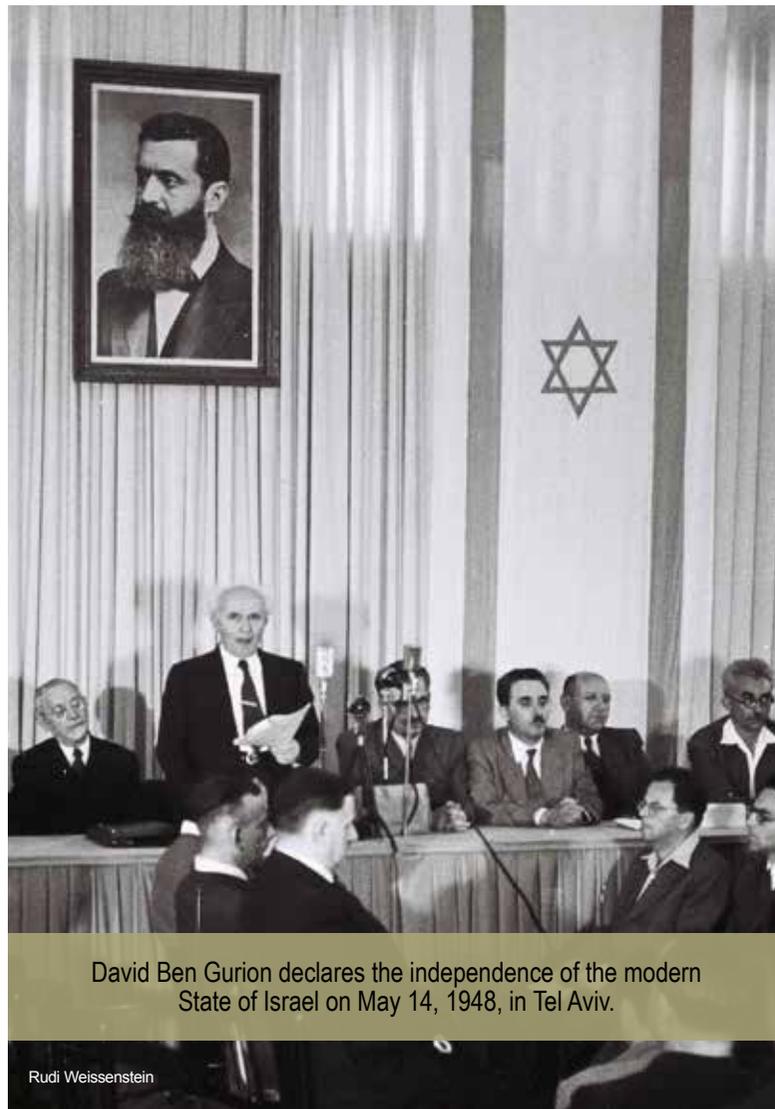


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THE MILLENNIUM: TO BE OR NOT TO BE

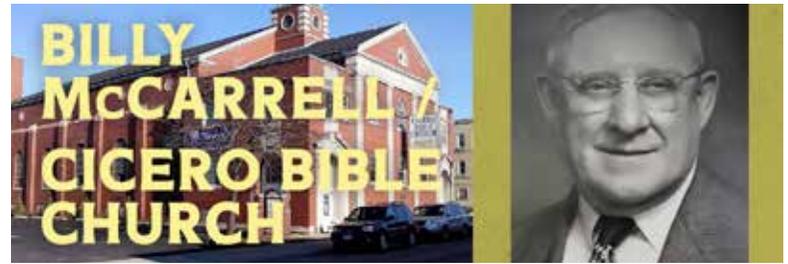
Even in the Reformed Baptist movement, though, there were still challenges. One point of concern in those early days was the lack of enthusiasm among some Calvinists for evangelistic work. Our Founder, after all, was an evangelist. That was his calling. But some of his Reformed friends said, in effect, “If they’re Elect, God will bring them in without our help.”

Another concern for Charles was the lack of support among Reformed preachers for the newly formed Jewish State. Israel had successfully fought its War of Independence in 1948–49, and in the early 1950s, Charles was excited about it being such an obvious fulfillment (or at the very least, a precursor to fulfillment) of biblical prophecy. He was disappointed to learn that many of his Reformed brethren were amillennial in their approach to eschatology. To them, we’re already in the Kingdom—and King Jesus rules from His heavenly throne now, rather than from the Davidic throne in Jerusalem during a future Millennium.



Some of his older, Reformed friends counseled him not to get carried away with “carnal” and “far-fetched” notions about literal prophetic fulfillments and the end times.¹ To them, the reestablishing of the State of Israel in the Middle East was nothing more than a curious novelty—a coincidental burp on the timeline of history. It wasn’t related to prophecy, as far as they were concerned. This frustrated Charles to no end.

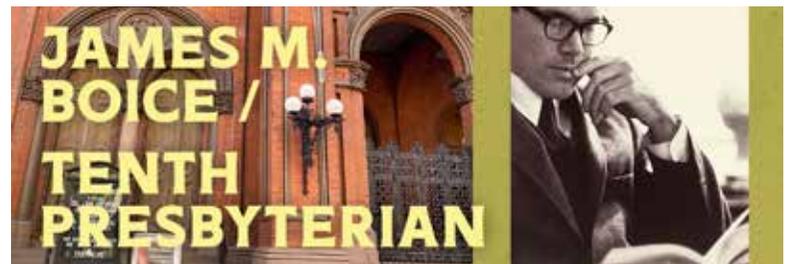
There were exceptions, of course. Charles eventually met other Reformed preachers who were premillennial. One of them was Pastor Billy McCarrell of Cicero Bible Church in Cicero, Illinois (1886-1979), who also served as a trustee of Wheaton College. He and his wife Minnie both took an interest in this young Jewish evangelist who was “still wet behind the ears,” but teachable and eager to learn.²



Later, in the 1960s, Charles learned about the far-reaching ministry of Dr. Bruce Dunn (1919–1993), pastor of the large Grace Presbyterian Church in Peoria, Illinois. Dunn was an outspoken premillennialist who affirmed the role of restored national Israel in God’s prophetic plan for the end times. He cosponsored many annual prophecy conferences with Moody Bible Institute in Central Illinois in the 1970s and 80s.



A few years later, Charles was introduced to James Montgomery Boice (1938–2000), who in 1968 became senior minister of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. Boice was a prolific evangelical scholar and commentator—and a Reformed premillennialist.³



W.A. Criswell (1909–2002), far-famed pastor of the First Baptist Church in Dallas and two-time president of the Southern Baptist Convention, was another one who caught Charles’ attention. They never met in person, as far as we know, but Criswell was an avowed, pro-Israel premillennialist who wasn’t shy about proclaiming his Calvinist proclivities. There were others, as well, and young Charles drew encouragement from the knowledge that he wasn’t alone in his maturing, premillennial, Reformed beliefs.

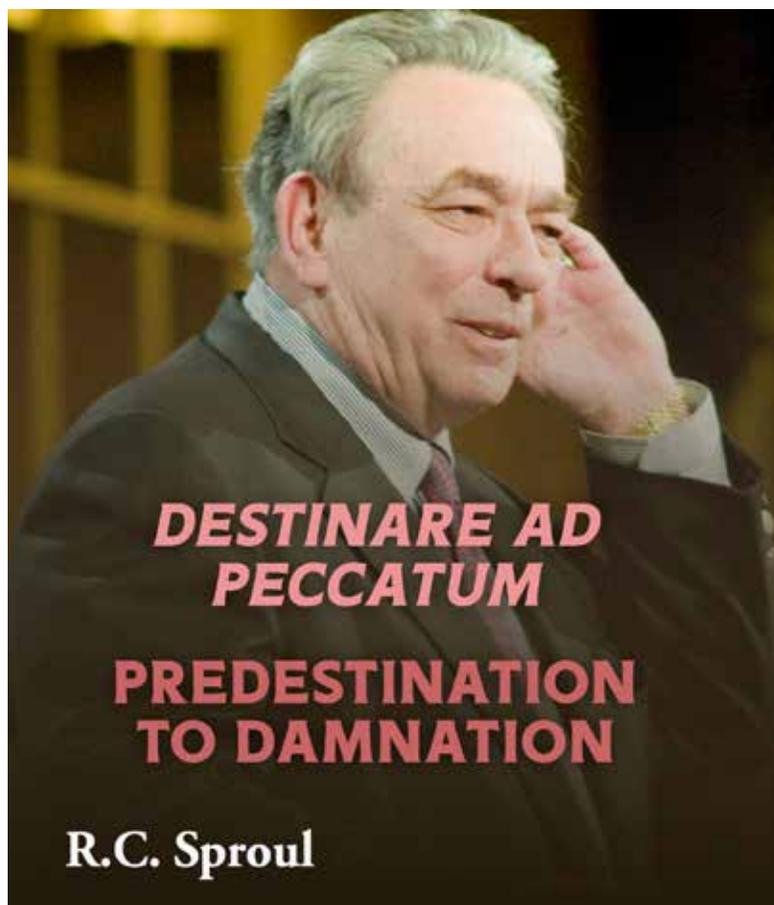


CALVINISM'S "DIRTY LITTLE SECRET"

Once his Reformed doctrinal foundation was solidified beneath him, our Founder was finally in a position to begin sorting out some of the remaining challenges he was encountering in Reformed church circles.

For example, John Calvin taught a doctrine known as reprobation, sometimes called double predestination. It's a tenet so terrible, a doctrine so despicable, that even to this day, many Calvinists (even some who believe it) don't like to talk about it. As we'll see later, Calvin himself said it was a "dreadful" decree.

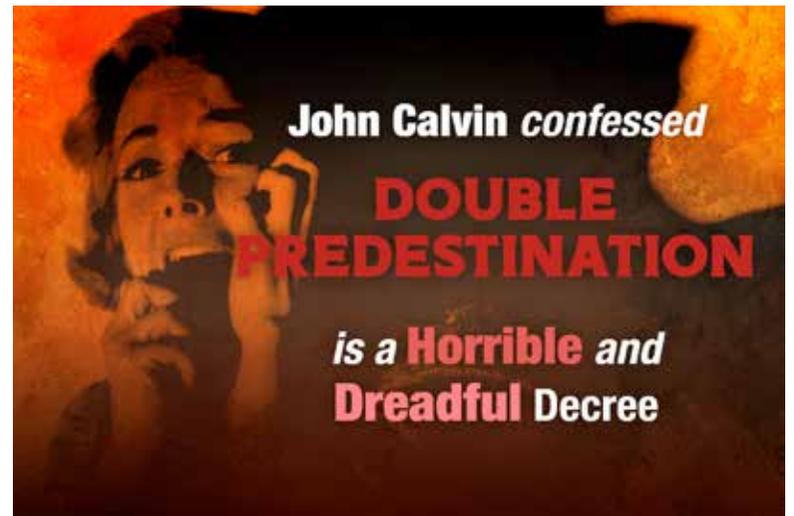
Reprobation (which they say is unconditional, like Election) means that certain people were pre-destined by God "from the beginning" (Latin, *ab initio*), even before they were born, to be condemned. They did nothing (other than being born) to condemn themselves. Because it was unconditional, it was completely out of their control. God created these reprobates, quite literally, so He could damn them. It is truly an ugly and offensive notion. Many of our Reformed brethren don't like to hear it described this way, but that's exactly what reprobationism means.



Here's how the late R.C. Sproul, a widely respected Reformed theologian and author, summarized the logical basis for reprobation:

If only some people are predestined to be saved, then it must follow that other people are not. The doctrine of predestination to salvation is called the doctrine of election. The doctrine of predestination to damnation is called the doctrine of reprobation.⁴

To Calvin and Sproul, reprobation (*destinare ad peccatum*, "predestination to damnation") was the logical flip side of Election. God's chosen ones are the unconditionally Elect and everyone else is unconditionally lost.



A FRIGHTENING PACKAGE

Why is reprobation such a dreadful notion? In the Reformed universe, reprobation incorporates several features which come together in a single, frightening package. It looks something like this:

1. Before the world began, God decreed that the totality of the soon-to-be-created human race would be divided into two infinitely different categories: (a) the Elect (i.e., God's "chosen" ones) and (b) the reprobates (His unchosen, or "passed over" ones).
2. The Elect would be pre-destined to spend Eternity with the Lord in Heaven and the non-elect would be pre-destined to eternal perdition.
3. The decision about who would be Elect and who would be non-elect was made by God alone and was completely unconditional (hence, Unconditional Election, the second TULIP point). That is, the Lord's choice wasn't based on any divine Foreknowledge about who we would be, or anything about us individually. There were no conditions or prerequisites of any kind, other than our being born as descendants of Adam.
4. According to reprobationists, then, there was nothing for us to believe, accept, or confess—because when the predestinating decree was made, none of us had been born yet.
5. Furthermore, God declined to take advantage of His Omniscience or Foreknowledge in choosing His Elect, so He didn't foresee us. He didn't say, "There is Gary, way out there in the future; I will save Him because I can see that he and I are going to be great friends." Instead, we were, in every applicable sense of the word, anonymous.⁵ According to Reformed confessions, that choice was based simply on the Lord's own good pleasure, and nothing else. No one was being recognized, rewarded, or punished for anything.

Any reprobationist who's reading this is probably about to blow a gasket right now. Why? Because these folks aren't accustomed to seeing their belief system laid out like this, completely naked for the world to see. In hyper-Calvinist circles, where they actually believe this nonsense, they dress it up with flowery language and spin their definition(s) so it doesn't sound so diabolical. Nonetheless, the package summarized in the five points above does indeed reflect what reprobationists believe and teach. If they're saying something else, it is **not** historic reprobationism—and most of them know it.

CALVIN'S CONFESSION

Fortunately, John Calvin was a painstakingly honest man. With him, what you see is what you get. We respect him for that. He explained his view of reprobation without sugarcoating it:

Again I ask: whence does it happen that Adam's fall irremediably involved so many peoples, together with their infant offspring, in eternal death unless because it so pleased God? Here their tongues, otherwise so loquacious, must become mute. **The decree** [of unconditional reprobation] **is dreadful indeed, I confess** [Latin, "*Decretum quidem horribile, fateor*"; French, "**Je confesse que ce decret nous doit epouvanter**"].⁶ Yet no one can deny that God foreknew what end man was to have before he created him, and consequently foreknew because he so ordained by his decree. . . .⁷ And it ought not to seem absurd for me to say that God not only foresaw the fall of the first man, and in him the ruin of his descendants, but also meted it out in accordance with his own decision. For as it pertains to his wisdom to foreknow everything that is to happen, so it pertains to his might to rule and control everything by his hand.⁸

Dreadful or not, then, Calvin saw no way around it. In his way of thinking, the doctrine of unconditional Election requires a corresponding and unconditional reprobation:

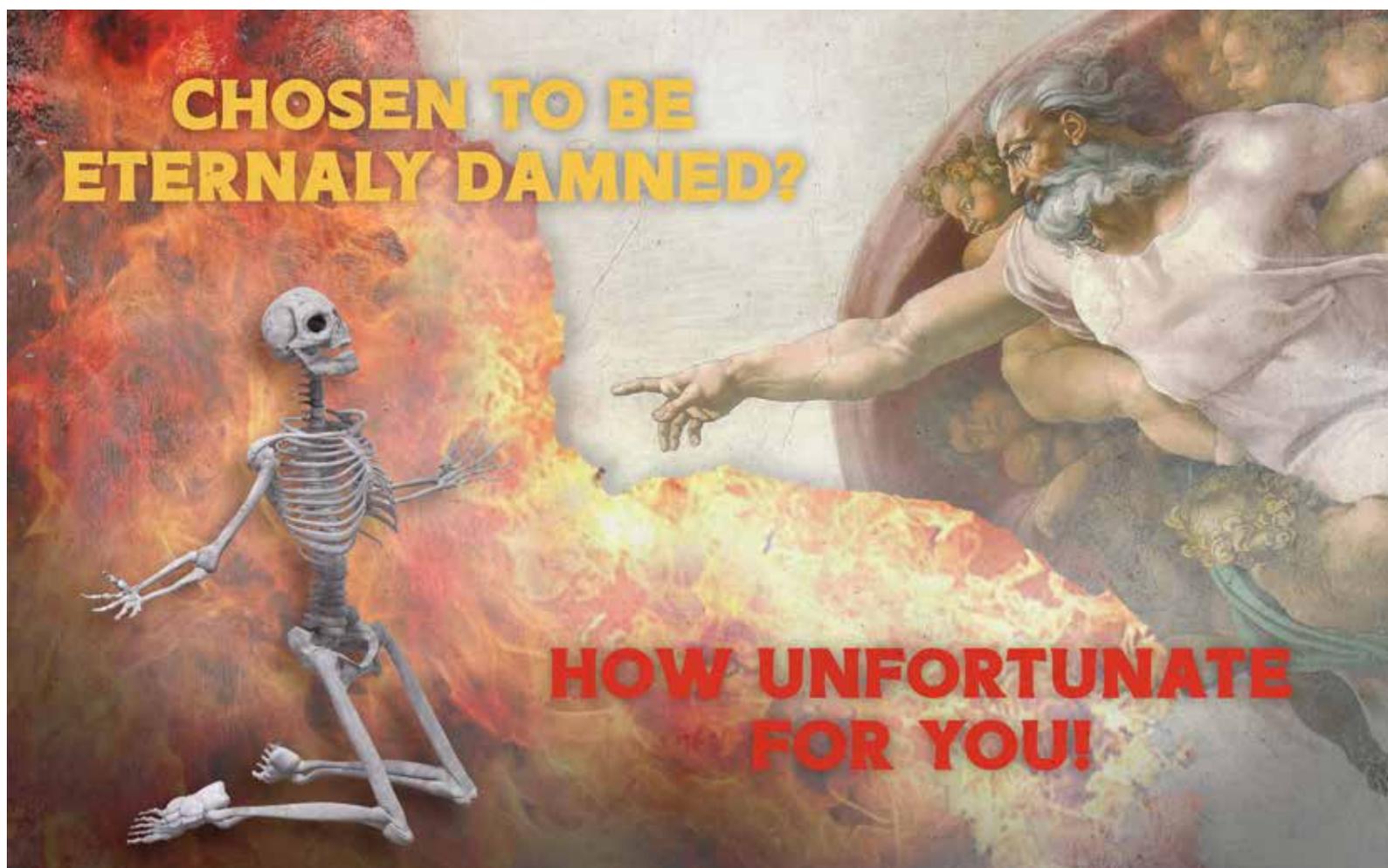
Many indeed (thinking to excuse God) own election, and yet deny reprobation; but this is quite silly and childish. For without reprobation, election itself cannot stand; whom God passes by, those he reprobates. **It is one and the same thing.**⁹

We can agree with Calvin here. Election and reprobation are indeed "one and the same thing," particularly if they're unconditional (that is, completely unrelated to any human actions). Both are about people's eternal destinies; and both are about God's sovereign choice in determining their destinies with no input from the humans themselves. So, if both Election and reprobation are unconditional, they do indeed go hand in hand.

That's an important point to remember. We're talking here about an **unconditional** predestinating decree. It was God deciding who would be His Elect and who would be reprobate.¹⁰ Calvin insisted on unconditionality in these matters—the same position Augustine, a thousand years earlier, had adopted later in his life. So, the decree was arbitrary, made by God alone, and had nothing to do with any human considerations.

So, that's what reprobation means. Not all Calvinists embrace this horrible idea, including yours truly. However, many do. What the reprobationists say is that God effectively condemned billions of people, spanning all the ages, by passing them over when He was choosing His Elect (that is, those whom He was going to save). The ones who were passed over were left reprobate—that is, rejected by God. This is the warped theology of traditional, TULIP Calvinism.

This is the "dirty little secret" of so-called "consistent" Calvinism. Even hyper-Calvinists who believe it are often reluctant to talk about it. And who can blame them? It's not only unbiblical—it's downright embarrassing. If this "hyper" teaching is correct, it means that people will be in Hell for no other reason than the simple fact that **God wants them there**. Young Charles Halff found this notion unconscionable.



UNPACKING REPROBATION

The Reformed *Westminster Confession of Faith* (WCF) refers to God's appointing "the Elect unto glory." Then it explains the fate of the non-elect (that is, those who were not chosen and are therefore reprobate):

The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby He extends or withholds mercy, as He pleases, for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by; and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice.¹¹



This is the Reformed doctrine of divine reprobation. Note that the Westminster divines employed fancy, flowery, pious language to say something horrible: namely, that God didn't want certain people to be saved. So, He just passed them by in the internal deliberations of the God-head when He was making His predestinating decree in Eternity past. The Lord didn't avail Himself of any Fore-knowledge of who the non-elect would someday be or what they would do. We're supposed to accept this atrocity because it was nothing personal. In effect, the non-elect were condemned anonymously.

Let's briefly review the *WCF*'s justification for this horror show:

1. It "pleased" God to condemn the non-elect (i.e., make them reprobate).
2. Don't bother trying to figure it out because His purpose is "unsearchable."
3. He reprobates people to demonstrate that He has "power over His creatures."
4. Reprobates have been pre-destined to "dishonor and wrath." Because it was a divine decree, it was both unconditional (that is, beyond their control) and irreversible.
5. Condemning reprobates brings praise to God and showcases His "glorious justice."

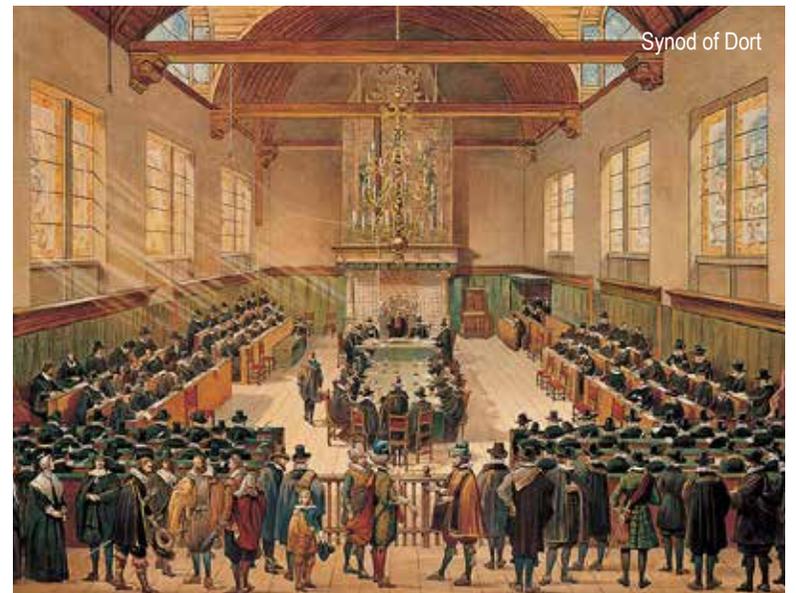
There are three words in that *WCF* article (above) that seem out of place: "for their sin." If reprobation was truly unconditional (like they say Election was), and if its basis was God's pleasure and justice, and nothing else, then the non-elects' condemnation (or reprobation) **wasn't because of their sin**. In legal vernacular, it wasn't "for cause." It was solely God's choice and had nothing to do with the reprobates themselves, or anything they would do, according to the unconditionalists.¹² To say otherwise requires a modified definition of the term "condition."

CAN "CONDITIONAL" EVER BE REFORMED?

Since so many problems are bound up in Calvin's ideas about **unconditional** Election and Predestination, what happens if we flip it around and make those divine actions conditional? That is, what if God, when He was making His predestinating decree in Eternity past, allowed Himself to be informed in some mysterious way by His Fore-knowledge of the future? What if He could actually see who we were—and who He was saving? So, upon the basis of His sovereign Omniscience (that is, His knowledge and awareness of all things past, present, and future), He decreed to save the ones He knew would be receptive, under freedom permitting circumstances, to the gracious, convicting work of His Holy Spirit in bringing them to salvation.¹³ This would make Election and Predestination (and salvation itself) conditional, would it not?

Traditional Calvinism extends the concept of unconditionality not only to Election and Predestination, but also to reprobation (i.e., the Lord's forsaking the non-elect). Unconditionality—at least, in its strictest sense—means that lost people won't be in Hell because they failed to meet any conditions. They won't be there because of anything they did or didn't do. They won't be there because of their resistance to divine truth, because of their evil deeds, or because they didn't think they needed saving. Rather, they will be there because that's where God wants them—it's what "pleased" Him, according to the *WCF*. That's what unconditional reprobation means.¹⁴

Some of our hyper-Calvinist friends say that if we make any of these things (Election/Predestination/reprobation) conditional—rather than unconditional, like the second TULIP point dictates—we are placing ourselves outside the Reformed fold. They say it makes us, in effect, Arminians rather than Calvinists.

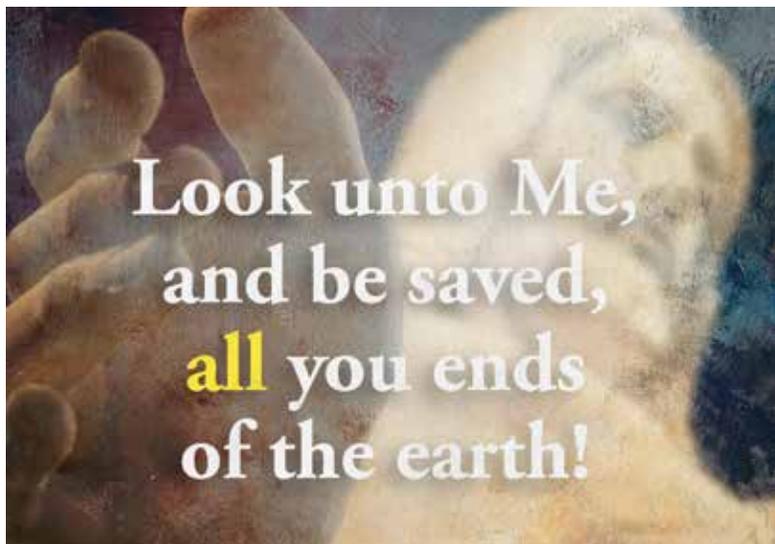


However, this impression is ill-informed. Historically, not all Reformed people have been five-point Calvinists. And yes, some have been conditionalists. The misunderstanding may stem from the fact that conditional Election was one of the distinctives of traditional Arminianism—and as such it was one of the Arminian Five Articles of Remonstrance that were addressed by the Synod of Dort in the Netherlands (1618–1619). However, conditional Election is by no means exclusive to the Arminian domain.

In the history of so-called, Reformed “Hardshellism,” for example, there’s a longstanding tradition of advocacy for (and battles over) conditional Election—that is, Predestination based on God’s Omniscience and Foreknowledge. In folksy, 1800s Appalachian communities, where Reformed people tended to be less scholastic and more pragmatic, there were many “conditionalists” or “limited predestinarians” who believed Election was conditional.

Many of today’s Primitive Baptists are descended from this line. They defend the view (shared by other hyper-Calvinists) that Salvation precedes faith—and some of them acknowledge that Election is based on divine Foreknowledge. They have been referred to as an “anti-missionary” sect because they believe it’s wrong to preach the Gospel to the non-elect. Primitive Baptists shy away from the term “Calvinist,” true enough; but they nonetheless occupy an important place in the history of the Reformed faith in North America.

The answer to the question, then, is yes—Reformed people can believe in conditional, rather than unconditional, Election and Predestination. We are certainly not the first ones to discover the inconsistencies and biblical difficulties inherent in claiming that these divine actions in Eternity past were unconditional and unrelated to any human activity.¹⁵



CONCLUSIONS

1. Does God predetermine, unconditionally, that some people must go to Hell?

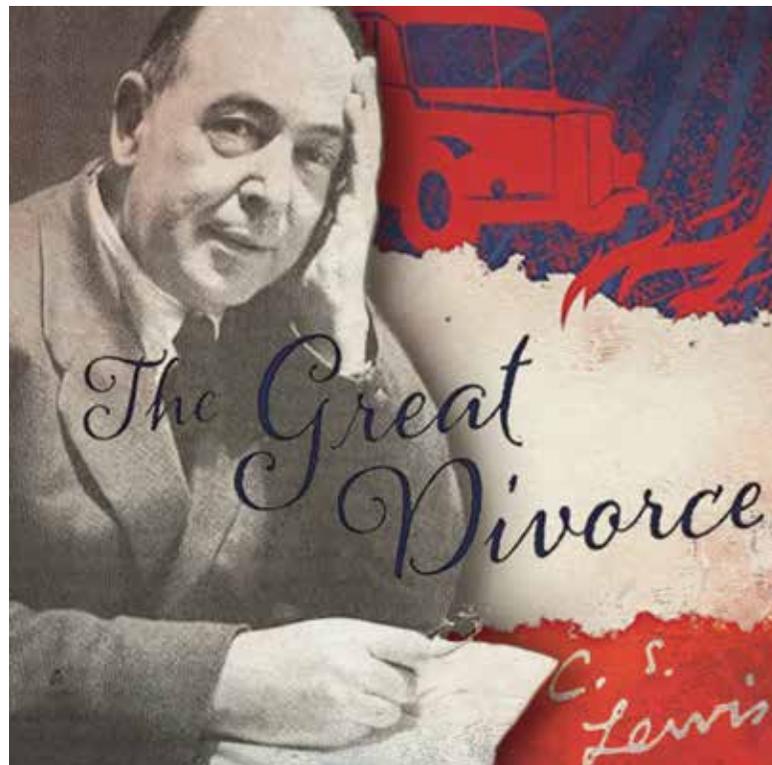
Reprobationists say He does; but the Bible says He doesn’t: *The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance* (2 Peter 3:9).

Notice that Peter says God doesn’t want **any** to perish! In fact, He went to extraordinary lengths to clear the pathway to Heaven for anyone who believes in His Son. That’s the condition: We must place our faith and trust in Yeshua the Messiah.

In fact, the Lord Himself indicated that Hell wasn’t created for human beings in the first place. It was meant to be the final abode for the devil and his fallen angels: *“Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels’”* (Matt. 25:41).

Effectively, people send themselves to Hell when they refuse to believe the Gospel. If you want to see how badly God wants to keep people out of Hell, just gaze upon Calvary, where He offered up His only begotten Son as the penal remedy for our sin. But His work there was **conditional** in the sense that it’s only efficacious when we believe and accept this Good News.

C.S. Lewis famously said, “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘**Thy** will be done.’ All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened.”¹⁶



2. Does the Bible teach reprobation?

No, it doesn’t. According to Scripture, everyone is potentially “Elect.” Anyone who is willing to come to the Lord in faith can be saved. People exclude themselves when they reject His love and the Redemption His Son purchased on Calvary. **Their destruction is their own doing, not God’s**—and it certainly doesn’t “please” Him, like some reprobationists claim.

This simple fact is indisputable: **The Bible nowhere affirms the doctrine of divine reprobation.** That is, it never says that God unconditionally and arbitrarily condemns the non-elect to eternal perdition. It never says there’s a whole, huge category of hapless, clueless people who cannot be saved because they weren’t chosen.

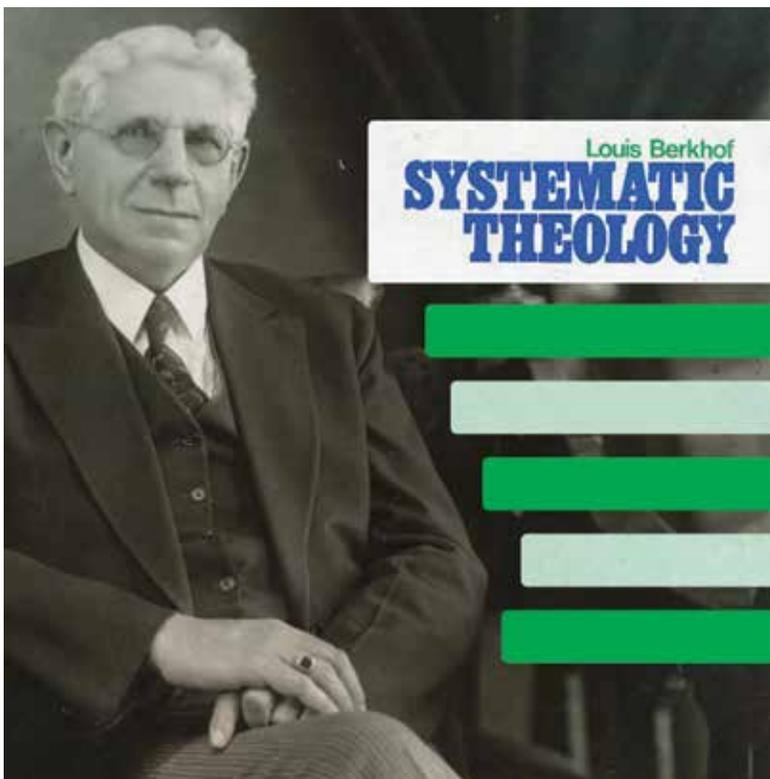
Over and over again, in fact, God makes strong statements to the contrary. For example, He invites anyone and everyone to come to Him and be saved: *“Come now, and let us reason together,” says the LORD, “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool”* (Isa. 1:18).

Later in the same book, He says, *Look unto Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other* (45:22, emphasis added). Clearly, the invitation is inclusive rather than exclusive!



We know, sadly, that not everyone who hears the Gospel will believe and accept it. Some will refuse and reject it. However, if they reject the Good News, that's on them—not on God. Anyone and everyone who comes to Yeshua in faith will be saved: *And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day* (John 6:40). He turns no one away.

If reprobation were true, surely it would have been important enough to mention at least once, somewhere in the Bible. But it's not there, anywhere. Even the eminent Calvinist theologian Louis Berkhof (who, oddly enough, believed in and defended reprobation) acknowledged that **“the doctrine of reprobation is not taught in Scripture.”**¹⁷

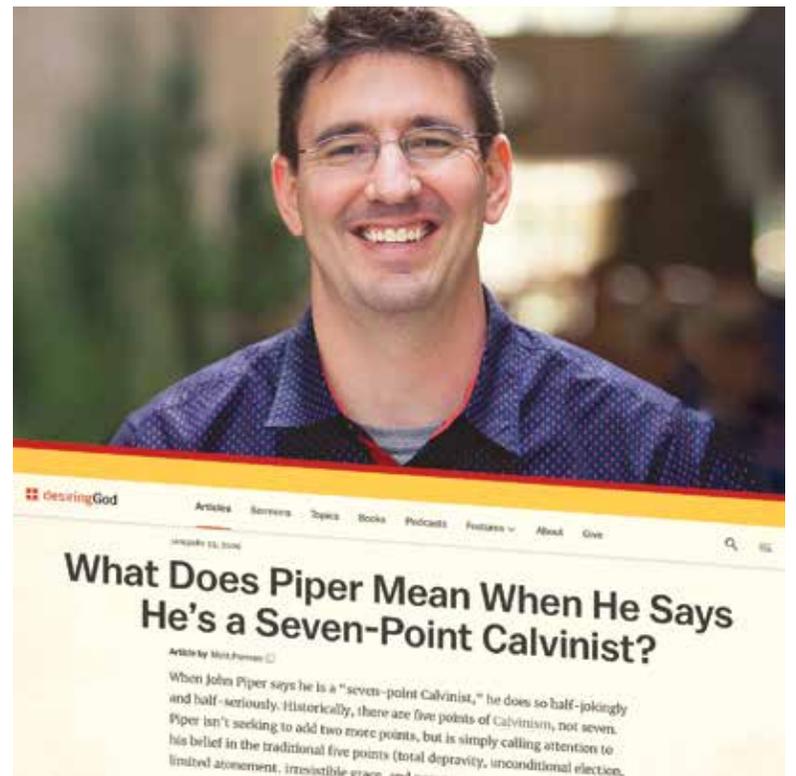


3. People are not condemned by God, but by their own unbelief.

The truth is that lost people are condemned by their own, stubborn unbelief—and their refusal of God's free gift of salvation. They're not unconditionally condemned by God, like reprobationists would have us believe. The condition for Election is belief; the condition for condemnation is unbelief. The Bible says, *He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son* (1 John 5:10, emphasis added).

On John Piper's *Desiring God* blogsite, Matt Perman explains his view that God's decree for reprobation was applied anonymously, in Eternity past, with no personal regard for the individuals who were being condemned:

. . . Double predestination . . . is simply the flip side of unconditional election. Just as God chooses whom he will save without regard to any distinctives in the person (Eph. 1:5–6; Acts 13:48; Rev. 17:8), **so also he decides whom he will not save without regard to any distinctives in the individual** (John 10:26; 12:37–40; Rom. 9:11–18; 1 Peter 2:7–8). By definition, the decision to elect some individuals to salvation necessarily implies the decision not to save those that were not chosen. God [unconditionally] ordains not only that some will be rescued from his judgment, but that others will undergo that judgment.¹⁸



That's an honest statement. The Bible, however, teaches something entirely different. It clearly and repeatedly issues the invitation for anyone and everyone to believe in God's Son and be saved: *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life* (John 3:16, emphasis added). Grace and salvation aren't dispensed on an unconditional basis to only a certain privileged few.

Our Founder, Charles Halff, used to say, **“No one will be able to look up from Hell and say to God, ‘I am here because You didn't want me.’”**

4. *The Lord knew us before we were born.*

Finally, neither Election nor condemnation were meted out on an anonymous or unconditional basis. Before the foundation of the world, in the internal deliberations of the eternal Godhead, our sovereign and omniscient Lord saw each of us personally and individually (Jer. 1:5; Psalm 139:15–16; Rom. 8:29; Gal. 1:15).

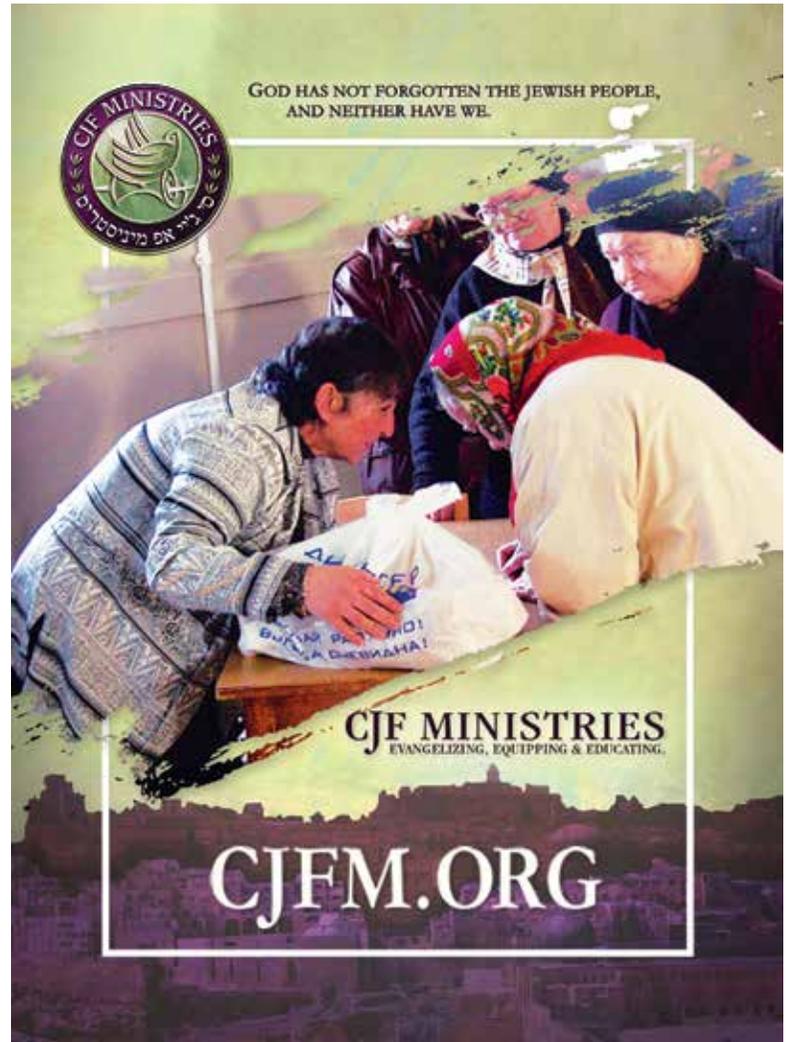
So, the Lord's choice of His Elect was informed in some mysterious way by His Foreknowledge of who we would be and how we would respond to Him. Peter says we are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father . . ." (1 Peter 1:2).¹⁹

In salvation, we come just as we are, with God's amazing grace helping us understand the Gospel so we can believe in His Son, *Adon Yeshua HaMashiach* (the Lord Jesus Christ): *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast* (Eph. 2:8–9).

And when we respond to His invitation, we find His loving arms open wide to welcome us. 



*Gary Hedrick
is president of
CJF Ministries.*



¹ Some Reformed people object to the dispensational brand of Premillennialism because of the reckless exegesis and sensationalism (like "date-setting," for instance) that sometimes comes with it. Our Founder, however, was a dispensationalist and cautioned that we should take care not to throw out the dispensational "baby" with the sensationalist "bath water." For him, true Dispensationalism was less about seven historic dispensations (or the timing of the Rapture) and more about the distinction between Israel and the Church, God's continuing plan for both entities, and their intersection at the end of the age in the Kingdom of God.

² Pastor William McCarrell was also founder of IFCA International, known in those days as the "Independent Fundamental Churches of America." Today, the largest IFCA church in America is John MacArthur's Grace Community Church in Southern California.

³ Boice, a historic premillennialist, wrote, "I still believe in a future fulfillment of the vision [of Daniel]. The kingdom of Christ will be a real, literal kingdom in the last days. I believe in a literal future millennium. But I also see the fulfillment in the present, for it is also now, in this age, that Jesus is doing these things" (*Seven Churches, Four Horsemen, One Lord* [Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2020], ed. Philip Ryken). Quoted on the Reformation21 website at reformation21.org. Historic Premillennialism (known as Chiliasm in ancient times) is a less nuanced version of its younger cousin, dispensational Premillennialism.

⁴ R.C. Sproul, "The Doctrine of Reprobation," accessed on the Ligonier Ministries blogsite at ligonier.org in August 2020.

⁵ Matt Perman will explain this in more detail later in this article.

⁶ Details are provided at this point in the Calvin quote because some critics have objected to various versions of the translation. However, this is precisely what he said—in English, Latin, and French. Reprobation is "dreadful" or "horrible."

⁷ Note Calvin's statement that God "foreknew" these things because He "so ordained [them] by His decree." He was a brilliant logician and knew the only way his system would work was if he equated Election with Foreknowledge; that is, God **foreseeing** something is the same as His having **decreed** that it must happen. This is circular reasoning, of course; but it was the only way his system would work. There must be no human freedom in Calvin's universe!

⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Vol. 1, *The Library of Christian Classics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 955. Emphasis added.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ There's a secular definition of "reprobation" that goes like this: "disapproval, condemnation, or censure," or "rejection." In the more specialized, theological sense, however, it means, "Rejection by God, as of persons excluded from the number of the Elect or from salvation" (dictionary.com).

¹¹ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter III ("Of God's Eternal Decree"), Point VII.

¹² The verb tenses are a little tricky in discussions about Election and reprobation because traditional Calvinist theology says the predestinating decree was made in Eternity past, before time began. So, we were all saved (or condemned, as the case may be) from time immemorial—in the distant "past," even before time itself existed.

¹³ It's important to point out here that traditional Reformed theology doesn't deny that God possessed Foreknowledge (that is, prescience of who His Elect would be); however, it says He didn't avail Himself of that pre-knowledge when He was formulating His predestinating decree in Eternity past. According to this view, we were, for all practical purposes, anonymous.

¹⁴ Historically, some Reformed theologians have said "guilty" (due to Original Sin) is the default setting for everyone. God rescued His Elect from the pool of humanity and left the rest alone (i.e., reprobated them).

¹⁵ Primitive Baptist (PB) writers have dealt with the unconditionalism vs. conditionalism debate in a variety of ways since the 1800s. See Chapter 119 ("Conditional or Unconditional?") of Stephen Garrett's book *The Hardshell Cult*. The book is unpublished, but the helpful and informative text is available online at old-baptist-test.blogspot.com/2012/01/chpt-119-conditional-or-unconditional.html. Stephen, now retired, is a second-generation PB preacher.

¹⁶ C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: HarperCollins, 1973), 29. Emphasis in bold is ours. There's some irony in Lewis' statements about human choices because he was from an Anglican background and would have been intimately familiar with the historic Reformed confessions and their statements about unconditional Election and Predestination. Nonetheless, Lewis affirmed the necessity of human freedom.

¹⁷ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 88; emphasis added. Berkhof affirmed reprobation because he believed it was properly deduced from the biblical data; but he recognized that it is never explicitly taught anywhere in Scripture.

¹⁸ Matt Perman, "What Does John Piper Mean When He Says He's a Seven-Point Calvinist?" on the *Desiring God* blogsite at desiringgod.org (January 23, 2006, emphasis added).

¹⁹ Many of God's ways are mysterious (and some will remain so); however, theologians have a proposal that they believe helps bridge the gap between divine Sovereignty and human free will. We'll talk about it in the next (and final) installment of this series.

Fruit from the Harvest



by Violette Berger



God at Work

Rob Styler, CJFM Director of Missions (Phoenix, AZ), writes: “Even though life has changed during the pandemic, I can still see God at work—His hand in our lives.” Recently, Rob walked into a store to get a new prescription for his glasses. He was greeted by “Carlie” with “Hi! Can I help you?” As they sat down and went over his prescription, she asked him where he had bought his frames. When Rob told her New York, she asked if he traveled a lot. Rob responded, “Yes, pre-pandemic, of course.” She then asked what he did. Rob told her that he was a Bible teacher, and they spoke a few more minutes before he left. When Rob returned the following week, Carlie was there to help him. Rob said, “God’s hand was evident once again. I was hoping to see her again, because this time I had a small New Testament I brought to give her.” After she checked his glasses, Rob gave her the book, telling her, “This is what I teach.” Rob saw God still working as she accepted it. Carlie gave Rob new glasses to improve his physical sight; please pray that the Word he gave her will bring Carlie new, enlightened spiritual sight.

Zoom Blessings

Michelle Beadle, CJFM Southeast representative (New Orleans), has been meeting with and teaching a group of Jewish and Gentile women believers about the Jewish roots of Christianity since February 2012. In March 2020, they wrapped up a series called, “The Heavens Declare the Glory of God.” The meetings resumed on Zoom in May 2020 to begin a 12-part series based on Michelle’s new book, *Messiah in Jewish Scripture*. In these sessions, she teaches the participants how to use the book to reach the lost and how to share their faith with Jewish people. She is blessed to sometimes have even Jewish individuals who are not believers join the Zoom meetings. Two regular attendees each invited an unbelieving Jewish friend who also joined the group. Please pray with Michelle that God will continue to use these sessions to further the Gospel (Good News) message.

On the Air

Richard Hill, CJFM representative and pastor of Beth Yeshua Messianic Congregation (Las Vegas), has some great news to announce. He is producing a new live video show on the *Messianic Lamb Network* every Tuesday, beginning in March, at 3:00 p.m. PST. The show is titled “Messiah in Prophecy.” They will be discussing and analyzing the pertinent prophecies of the Bible concerning Yeshua (Jesus), Israel, and the Messianic Community (Body of Messiah). Richard will also be interviewing leading scholars of prophecy regarding current events and how they relate to end-time events. He invites everyone to view the show and be a part of it via chat at messianiclambnetwork.com. Click on “7 Days of Live Shows,” and then click on Richard’s show at the right time for live viewing. If you’re unable to view it live, you can then watch it later in the archives. Please join Richard in praying for the Lord to be glorified and blessed in this new endeavor.

Faith Comes from Hearing

Northeast CJFM representative, Diann Parkas (New Jersey), is excited about an online, secular group she got involved with that offers opportunities for individuals to connect and get to know each other. It’s a goldmine opportunity for sharing the Good News of Messiah. The purpose of the group is to develop communication skills and empathetic ways of relating to each other. Diann writes: “On one occasion I found myself in a group with a young man from Florida and two seniors from Ireland. They started sharing about their families, and so I followed suit. It’s really easy for me to include testimony and content about the Lord when I share about my family, and the three of them heard a clear word about the power and goodness of God that day. Please pray that they would remember what they heard and be spurred to seek the Lord!”

Campus Evangelism

Eric Chabot, CJFM Midwest representative (Columbus, OH), has resumed his evangelistic outreach on the campus of Ohio State University following the winter break. Classes are held both online and onsite, although events will not be allowed until the fall. Despite the bitter cold, Eric and his outreach partner set up a table on campus with a survey sign that asked the question of the day: “Does Eternal Life Matter?” The choice of answers was “Yes,” “No,” or “I Don’t Know.” As they prayed for divine appointments, three young male students approached them and answered the question, which resulted in a lengthy conversation. All three came from a Catholic background and were in the process of rethinking a lot of their beliefs. They listened intently to a clear explanation of the Gospel, and two of the students eagerly prayed and made first-time commitments to the Lord. Eric writes: “We were delighted that despite the hindrances in the weather, God sent us these divine appointments in addition to the numerous other students we spoke with. Pray that God’s seed was planted in each one and that He prepares hearts for future campus encounters.” Eric also writes about a young Orthodox Jewish man who contacted him via email asking questions concerning the claims and beliefs about the Messiah. Pray for God to work in this man’s life as they continue to dialogue about these issues. Also, pray for the spiritual growth of a young man who came to faith on campus and whom Eric disciples on a weekly basis.

Who is He?

Violette Berger, CJFM representative and staff writer (Phoenix, AZ)—I am blessed by the opportunities God continues to give me to share the Gospel message in person and on the phone despite the pandemic shutdown. I attended an art fair recently and saw one of my favorite jewelry and ceramic artists. She is Jewish and was born in Israel but now lives in Phoenix. We have become friends. She has been to my home twice, thus far, where we have engaged in some interesting, thoughtful conversations about spiritual matters. She and her husband are non-religious and have never considered that Yeshua (Jesus) may indeed be the Promised Jewish Messiah. She has taken the tracts I have given her, plus a book on Creation by Dr. Walt Brown, and thanked me for them. Please pray that the seeds planted would come to fruition for both her and her husband.

Bible Questions & Answers

by DR. GARY HEDRICK

Have a Bible question?

Submit it to Dr. Hedrick at garyh@cjfm.org, or mail it to 611 Broadway, San Antonio, Texas 78215.

You may see your question addressed in a future issue of *Messianic Perspectives*.

QUESTION: Wayne Grudem, in his best-selling *Systematic Theology*, says that Romans 9 proves that reprobation is true when it talks about “vessels of wrath prepared for destruction.” You obviously disagree. Are you comfortable contradicting someone as esteemed as Dr. Grudem?

ANSWER: Many of us have been blessed by Dr. Grudem’s work, so whenever we disagree publicly with someone of his stature, rest assured that we don’t do so lightly. In the footnote you’re talking about, Professor Grudem is critiquing Jack Cottrell’s Arminian view of Romans 9:18: “He has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.”¹ Grudem maintains that Cottrell errs when he says this passage in Romans 9 is about service, not salvation—and we agree that Cottrell is wrong on that point. The passage is definitely about salvation—including (in the case of Israel) national salvation. Paul is laying groundwork in Chapter 9 for his refutation in Chapter 11 of the specious view that ethnic Israel has been permanently superseded by the Church.

Here’s the context in this section of Romans:

Chapter 9 — Israel’s past election

Chapter 10 — Israel’s present condition

Chapter 11 — Israel’s future, glorious restoration

The Apostle’s point in Chapters 9–11 is that God can show mercy on whomever He wishes (9:15–18), including not only the Gentiles, but also a future, restored national Israel (Chapter 11). He warns mostly-Gentile, New Covenant believers not to rejoice in Israel’s temporary “stumble” and fall (11:16–24) because someday the Lord’s earthly people will be grafted back in (vv. 23–26).

More to the point, though, Professor Grudem (in his book) appeals to Paul’s reference to “vessels of wrath prepared for destruction” (9:22) as a confirmation of the truth of reprobation. Remember that reprobation (or so-called “double predestination”) says that God created some people (that is, the non-elect) for the express purpose of unconditionally condemning them to Hell. Since it’s a decree, according to the reprobationists, it’s the unalterable, predetermined destiny of the lost. This is the view Dr. Grudem is defending.²

Here in Romans 9, the “vessels of wrath” are the unchosen (v. 22) and the “vessels of mercy” are the chosen (v. 23). We agree on that much. If reprobation is a real thing, though, and some people are unalterably unchosen (that is, passed over by God and pre-destined for eternal “destruction”), then a question that begs to be answered is this: **Why is Paul so heartbroken over Israel’s lost condition?** He says,

“I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh” (Rom. 9:2–3). The problem is this: If Israel’s lostness in the first century was God’s doing and not their own, and if, like reprobationists say, it’s an unalterable and irrevocable (divinely ordained) condition, why is there such a tone of anguish and utter desperation in the Apostle’s voice?

If it were really true that there are certain people (“reprobates”) whom God doesn’t want to save, wouldn’t Paul’s agonized tone here in Romans 9 place him at cross-purposes with God? Of course, it would. That’s why we say it makes more sense to say that Paul is talking in Romans 9 about two opposing faith communities (that is, traditional [non-Messianic] Israel and the first-century Messianic movement or the “church”), one of which (Israel, or “Jacob”) has been set aside **temporarily** in order to show God’s sovereign mercy toward the other (that is, the church and its Jewish and Gentile believers). Paul was anticipating the objection of his former rabbinic colleagues to any possibility of God showing mercy to the Gentiles and accepting them into the community of faith. So, he lays it on the line: **God can show mercy to whomever He wishes** (vv. 15, 18). The fact that Paul clearly declares that God’s mercy and grace are now (under the New Covenant) available to “all” (11:32) is a problem for five-point Calvinism and its exclusivism. And since Paul says in Chapter 11 that Israel’s setting aside is temporary, we can only conclude that he’s not talking about an eternal predestinating decree here in Chapter 9. That’s because decrees are permanent and irrevocable (11:28–29). According to 11:26, Israel’s “rejection” in Chapter 9 is only temporary. Hence, there is no irrevocable decree of reprobation in Chapter 9. One of our guiding principles in interpreting Romans 9–11 is that nothing in Chapter 9 can be interpreted in a way that contradicts Chapter 11. The Apostle does not contradict himself.

Here’s another question for our reprobationist friends. Why does Paul say that God “**endured with much longsuffering** the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction” (v. 22)? If unbelievers are merely doing what God himself created them to do, what is there for Him to patiently endure? Why would “much longsuffering” be required for Him to endure His own decree? You see, it doesn’t make sense. If the lost people in Romans 9 were doing what they had been eternally decreed and pre-destined to do, Paul should be pleased, not grieved, with that outcome. Therefore, Romans 9 is not a good proof-text for the hyper-Calvinist notion of reprobation, especially when it’s considered in the light of Chapter 11.³

¹ “The Nature of the Divine Sovereignty,” in *The Grace of God, the Will of Man*, ed. Clark Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 114.

² The eminent Calvinist theologian Loraine Boettner was more outspoken than Grudem in his defense of reprobationism. Quoting the Westminster Confession, he claimed that it “pleased” God, in His predestinating decree, “to pass by” certain hapless sinners, thereby condemning them. That is, their rejection of the Gospel was God’s doing, not theirs. This is why so-called “double predestination”—which sees reprobation as an irrevocable divine decree—breaks down in this section of Romans. It fails to acknowledge that Israel’s rejection is temporary, not permanent. This contradicts Boettner’s characterization of it as an unalterable, divine decree: “The Westminster Confession, after stating the doctrine of election, adds: ‘The rest

of mankind, God was pleased, according to the inscrutable counsel of His own will, whereby He extendeth or withholdeth mercy as He pleaseth, for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, **to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath** for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice’ [Ch. III: Sec. 7]” (Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine Of Predestination* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1932], location 1406 of 6003 in the Kindle edition, emphasis added).

³ For more detailed treatments of Romans 9–11, see Grant Osborne’s commentary, *Romans Verse by Verse* (Bellingham, WA: Kirkdale Press, 2017) and “The Pharaoh Initiative: God’s Middle Knowledge in Action through a Pauline Perspective” by Christian Ramsey in *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 62.4 (2019), 749–58.

IN THIS ISSUE

**Are Some People
Predestined to Hell?
Calvin's "Dreadful" Doctrine**

by Gary Hedrick
Page 1

Fruit from the Harvest

by Violette Berger
Page 10

Bible Questions & Answers

Reprobation and
Contradicting Dr. Grudem
Page 11

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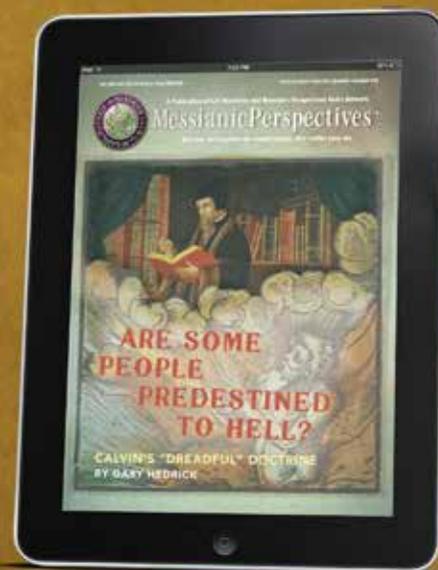
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