

The Second Great Debate: Is Calvinism Biblical?

This is an informal debate on the subject "Is Calvinism Biblical". The participants in the debate are as follows:

Defending the Reformed (Calvinist] position is Dr. Larry Bray, President of The North American Reformed Seminary:

Lawrence Bray was born in Columbus, OH. He was raised in an atheist family, not being drawn to Christ for salvation until he was about 21 years old. Dr. Bray now lives in Pennsylvania with his family: Priscilla (wife), Brian (son), and Zoe (daughter). He is an Elder with the Reformed Presbyterian Church (PCA) as well as the president of The North American Reformed Seminary (TNARS). In 2008 he received his first doctorate (D.Min.) through TNARS (prior to becoming their president), and in 2009 he earned a Doctor of Divinity (meritum causa) from Miami International Seminary.

Opposing the Calvinist position is Bob Enyart, Pastor of Denver Bible Church:

Bob Enyart became a Christian in 1973 and then began a life of Bible study and ministry. In 1999, Pastor Bob Hill and the elder board of Derby Bible Church ordained Bob Enyart into the ministry, starting Denver Bible Church in 2000. In 1991 Bob began hosting the live radio talk show "Bob Enyart Live", which still airs every weekday. Bob has been a prolific writer, and has authored numerous audio and video teaching, various writings and books on current moral issues such as abortion and homosexuality, and promoting an Open Theist and Dispensational view of the Scriptures.

The debate will last a duration of 7 days, with a 24 hour requirement for responses. Each participant must address the issues in a civil manner, and each participant is allowed to post only once and wait for a response before posting again. This is a closed debate. It is asked that no one else post on this thread during the debate. Any outside comments will be deleted. Since Pastor Enyart made the challenge, he will be granted the opening statement.

The debate will take place in the comments below this note, and will begin when Mr. Enyart is ready to make his opening statement. PARTICIPANTS: Please click on the link for the note, and then post each time. Thank you.

Bob Enyart – Arminian, Open Theist – posts will be red
Larry Bray – Calvinist – posts will be blue

Thank you both, David New for hosting this debate "Is Calvinism Biblical?" on your Facebook page, and Dr. Lawrence Bray, for agreeing to talk about the Bible's teachings regarding God and whether or not He has predestined everything. Dr. Bray, I'm sure we both agree that whichever doctrines most glorify God, they represent true theology. I'd like to start looking at verses from Romans 9, John 15, Isaiah 46 and Psalm 139 about all our days written before there was one of them; Jesus saying, You did not choose Me, but I chose you; God knows the end from the beginning; and that God loved Jacob and hated Esau before they had done any good or evil. Absolutely, if we just read such verses out of context, they certainly look like they support Calvinism. But please consider their contexts:

I Chose You: For example, when the Lord Jesus said, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you" (John 15:16), He was having an intimate discussion with His disciples preparing them for His imminent death and soon departure. The Scriptures record how, three years earlier, Jesus found them, saying to Peter and Andrew, "Follow Me," and to Matthew, "Follow Me." They were fishing, and Matthew was collecting taxes. And Jesus "found Philip and said to him, 'Follow Me.'" And so on. Jesus had gone out on a mission to choose His disciples; He picked them, which after their Last Supper He reminded them about in order to encourage them. If we ignored the context, when Jesus prayed during this same Last Supper, "Father... I have finished the work which You have given Me to do" John 17:4, we couldn't know what He meant by, "I have finished the work," because Jesus hadn't yet been crucified to where He could say, "It is finished." The context of this intimate discussion with His Apostles indicates He had "finished" his work with them preparing them for His death and soon ascension. He was not speaking of providing salvation. Likewise, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you," is what the Lord said to His disciples, whom He chose as Apostles. It is taking that out of context to use it as a proof text for Irresistible Grace.

God Knows the End from the Beginning: This is perhaps the most misquoted Bible verse. Isaiah 46:10, Dr. Bray, both in the official Bible version of your ministry, The North American Reformed Seminary, the English Standard Version (ESV) and in the King James and the New King James Version which I use, says, "Declaring the end from the beginning..." God has declared that He will have the victory over His enemies and that those who "love the LORD... God will bless... But if your heart turns away... you shall surely perish..." So God has declared what He will do, and being the Creator with great power, knowledge, and integrity, we trust He will have the victory that He has declared. Some of the OMNIs and IMs, the Latin and Greek philosophical terms that theologians use to describe God, like omniscience, omnipresence, and impassibility, do not appear in the Bible. If God's Word teaches the doctrine of exhaustive foreknowledge, that would have to be shown from

other scriptures, because Isaiah 46 teaches something that we both agree with, that God declares the outcome. So it is not a proof text for omniscience.

All My Days were Written: Dr. Bray, yes I can see how Psalm 139:16 can be used to defend Calvinism but that would be true if the context was about a man's life and death. But it's not; it's about his birth, and fetology, that is, about God's grand design of the development of the baby in the womb. Psalm 139:13, 14-15: "For You formed my inward parts; you covered me in my mother's womb... My frame [Hebrew: bones, skeleton] was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth." This last phrase is a Hebrew figure of speech for the womb, for Adam was made from the earth, and Job 1:21 uses this figure by ellipsis saying, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there." Then to our verse, "Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed." The Holy Spirit is celebrating the genetic code, which God wrote, the DNA in the baby's first living cell, which had not yet begun to build the baby's body, which was at that moment still unformed in the womb. And finally, of the glorious genetic code that God wrote for mankind: "And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them." Calvinists quote this verse to me claiming that Psalm 139 teaches that every day of our lives was written right up till the day of our death, and when I ask them if they recall that the context is about God's design of the development of the unborn baby, they look surprised and are always fascinated when we turn to the passage. A renowned creation scientist, biologist Gary Parker, as he happened to be walking past a conversation going on at the Rocky Mountain Creation Fellowship about Psalm 139:16, said, "Oh yeah, those are days in the womb." Psalm 139, although it is widely quoted as a proof text, does not teach total predestination.

Jacob I have loved, Esau I have hated: Calvinists use this as a proof text for their painful doctrine that God hates some babies and loves others, and of course if we're going to attribute that kind of position to God, then we'd want to be certain that we are not taking this passage out of context. However, Dr. Bray, the Holy Spirit here is not speaking of two babies and their eternal salvation. But by the Apostle Paul throughout this section of Romans, He's speaking of two nations: that God is justified in temporarily cutting off Israel, and grafting in the Gentiles, whereas He will later graft Israel back in again. Regarding baby Jacob and Esau, Genesis 25 says, "But the children struggled together within her... And the LORD said to her: "Two nations are in your womb, Two peoples..." In a DVD debate with a dear brother in the Lord, Pastor Brian Schwertley of Reformed Online, after he said that Romans 9 wasn't about Israel and the Gentiles, I came back with a lot of material, which anyone can find for themselves, indicating that this was exactly Paul's topic. And by the way, the prophesy there that, "The older shall serve the younger," was not true of the two as individuals, for Jacob was the one bowing down before and serving Esau, but this prophecy is of one of "the two nations" in Rebekah's womb. Also of course, love and hate here are used as a typical Hebrew figure of speech which means to love and to love more. As Jesus said, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children ... he cannot be My disciple." Of course, Jesus was not negating the teaching to love your family, but we must love Him more. This was true also of Jacob and Esau's mother, for Gen. 29:30 says that Jacob "loved Rachel more than Leah," and the very next verse, Gen. 29:31, says in the Hebrew, as translated in the King James, that "When the Lord saw that Leah was hated..." When she died Jacob gave Leah the honor of burial in his family's tomb, a kindness that Rachel did not receive. For God chose Jacob, that is, one nation, through whom He would bring the law, the covenants, the priesthood, and ultimately, the Messiah, as part of His plan to reach the world with the message of salvation. And that is why, 2,000 years later, Jesus died for the sins of the world, yet He was sent only to the House of Israel. "For the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand... As it is written, 'Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.'" So Romans 9 teaches that God was justified in choosing Israel and later in setting them aside for unbelief (albeit partially and temporarily, Rom. 11:25-26). Romans does not teach that God hated unelected babies.

Dr. Bray, thanks for engaging on this important topic. I haven't described the five points of Calvinism since many on the Open Theist side of the debate are extremely familiar with them, as I presume Calvinists themselves are also. Many of the pastors and teachers I meet who oppose Open Theism are not very aware of the Bible verses used to defend the doctrine, whereas the Open Theist teachers I know have read thousands of pages of writings from Calvinist theologians. So I thought it would be fine to dig right into the Scriptures. Feel free to present passages that you believe teach that God predestined everything, and I'd love for us to look at them in their immediate and greater contexts.

Greetings Mr. Enyart!

I'm glad to have this opportunity to discuss the merits of Calvinism with you. I'm glad that you have set up some of the parameters in your opening post. There are many facets to Calvinism, and knowing that we will focus in on "the Bible's teachings regarding God and whether or not He has predestined everything" will produce a more fruitful discussion than one with a less clear focus on the numerous other Calvinist distinctives.

Let me start of by agreeing with your assessment of Jn 15:16 and Jesus "Choosing you" referring to the Apostles within the context.

I would like to jump right to the Romans 9 passage that you have posted on. There is certainly a distinction brought out

between those who are in Israel versus those who are outside of Israel. This distinction is much deeper than mere national ties, however. Rather it draws the line between the children of God and the children of men (Rom 9:26). This is why God can say to Moses, long after Jacob and Esau "I will have mercy on whom I will..." (Rom 9:15). Then even a more general statement about "human will" in Rom 9:16.

The passage clearly teaches that out of "the same lump" (v.21) God makes both vessels of wrath and of mercy. In this way God can both show His wrath, which He desires to do (v.22), and His mercy (v.23).

I disagree with your statement: "Also of course, love and hate here are used as a typical Hebrew figure of speech which means to love and to love more." Making it parallel to Christ telling us to hate our father is disingenuous to the text. The context of Romans 9 is much different than the context of Christ's remarks. Romans 9 shows those who God pours out His wrath on, which is compatible with hatred rather than love. It's illegitimate to equate the love that a son is to have for his father with the supposed love you presuming God should have for the reprobate.

My guess is that you keep referring to babies in order to illicit an emotional plea for your side of the debate. If you'd like to continue down that road i am fine with it, but i would encourage you to try to stick to Scripture and stay away from emotional appeals....they can get us into trouble if seen through to their logical conclusions.

I think there are other Scriptures that speak plainly of God being the one who elects us to salvation...

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me drags him. And I will raise him up on the last day. (Joh 6:44)

How can it be said that we choose Christ when we are told that the Father "drags" us to Him?

And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed (ordained) to eternal life believed. (Act 13:48)

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Rom 8:29-30)

even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, (Eph 1:4-5)

Thanks Dr. Bray for your reply, and for agreeing with your opponent no less, that when Jesus said, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you," He was referring to us but to His apostles. I'll address one of your verses for now, and then Romans.

Regarding John 6:44, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him..." This is why God is drawing the whole world. As John earlier wrote:

- Jesus is, "the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world" (John 1:9).

- And the Lord Himself said, "And I, if I am lifted up... will draw all peoples to Myself" (John 12:32).

- And Paul described, "God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved" (1 Tim. 2:3-4).

Of course we'll have to address the perennial, "When does 'all' mean 'all'?" question, which is only answered by the proper hermeneutics. Hermeneutics are tools, or rules of thumb, for interpreting the Bible. In our next round if I have the space I'd like to offer a list of seven hermeneutics and suggest how they can be prioritized because the more "tools" we have to interpret a verse, we can easily turn them into "tricks" to get it to mean what we want. In the meantime, as we trade proof texts, what we are really showing is the great need for good hermeneutics. Now to continue addressing John 6:44...

- Paul also wrote that God, "has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings." That is, just as liberals cannot righteously redefine what a family is, neither can men arbitrarily declare what a nation is, for nations, as families, come in and out of existence with boundaries that are not arbitrary but flow from the nature of God's creation. And then Paul says that God has made "every nation of men... so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us (Acts 17:26-27).

- For God draws all men by "the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness" (Rom. 2:15).

- For "the gospel... was preached to every creature under heaven" (Col. 1:23)

- "For 'whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. [But] How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?"

- "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: 'Their sound has gone out to all the earth...' " (Rom. 10:17-18) That is, the testimony of creation (Rom. 1:19-21; Ps. 19) reaches everyone.

- For God's standard is as the Lord stated in Luke 12:48, to whom much is given, much shall be required.

- As Moses wrote, "the LORD will scatter you among the peoples... And there you will serve gods, the work of men's hands... But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deut. 4:27-29).

- The "vineyard... is the house of Israel," whom God did everything to bless, "So He expected it to bring forth good grapes [repentance], but it brought forth wild grapes [rebellion]." Isaiah 5:1-7

- In Jeremiah God described his chosen nation as "that faithless one, Israel" (Jer. 3:6) and then he said, in the Hebrew, "She will return to Me, but she did not return." Dr. Bray, similarly, your ESV translation quotes God saying, "And I thought, 'After she has done all this she will return to me,' but she did not return" (Jer. 3:7).

- For, "if My people [the nation of Israel], who are called by My name [the name God gave to Jacob], will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (1 Chr. 7:14).

Dr. Bray of course no one in the Lake of Fire will seek God, for He will not be there drawing them. And in explaining that Gentiles are as bad as Jews (Rom. 3:9) Paul writes that no one seeks God, no one does good, no, not one, for apart from God calling both Jew and Gentile, we could do nothing but sink in our sin.

- Peter writes that God is, "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9 (where the Greek states that God is counseling that all have room for repentance).

- And because He is merciful, "I did not say to the seed of Jacob, 'Seek Me in vain'; I, the LORD, speak righteousness, I declare things that are right" (Isaiah 45:19). But Jacob as a nation did not seek Him.

- Yet still, in mercy as the Lord said, "seek, and you will find... For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Mat. 7:7-8).

The Potter and the Clay. Dr. Bray you agree that Romans 9 does address Israel but you say that it is not primarily about God being justified in casting away Israel. In your reasons you cite the potter and the clay passage that Paul quotes from Jeremiah 18. But God Himself interprets the potter and the clay passage for us:

- For it is "concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom," that, "if that nation against whom I have spoken," repents, then God Himself will repent "of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it" (Jer. 18:7-8).

- "And the instant I speak concerning a nation," to give it a kingdom, God says if that nation rejects Him, then He will repent (using the standard Hebrew word for repent), and reject it (Jer. 18:9-10).

- For God says, "as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!" (Jer. 18:6)

- And God's intention as the potter was to make a vessel of honor out of Israel, but the warning of the parable, which came to pass in the New Testament as explicitly stated in Romans 11, is that, "the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make" (Jer. 18:4).

So God did not complete the first vessel that He was attempting to make, and so "made it again, into another vessel." For dishonor. That's Paul's point, because it's hard to give a kingdom to people who hate the King. "Yes, again and again they tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel" (Ps. 78:41).

Let's see if Romans 9 to 11 is primarily about Israel being cast away.

- Romans 2:11: "there is no partiality with God"

- Romans 3:9 Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, asks, "Are we [the Gentiles] better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin." The New Testament mentions circumcision more than twice as frequently as the Old, and much of that is by Paul here.

- Romans 4:9-10: "Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also?" For was Abraham accounted righteous, "While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised." For "as it is written, 'I have made you a father of many nations!'"

- Romans 5 & 6 are all about being "justified by faith" (Rom. 5:1) and of course this means faith alone, without works.

Recall though that Luther added the word "alone" to his German translation of the Bible at Rom. 3:28, and ironically he did this because He didn't think God's word sufficient to make the case, and in spite of God's warning not to add to the Word. Luther was part of a trend of translators inserting their doctrine into translation. I was once invited to discuss Calvinism with a long-time reformed pastor Leonard Coppes who was a member of the New King James translation team, which I only mention to remind readers that translators are real live people. They have strongly held doctrines that often find their way into our Bible translations. For example Dr. Bray, that Acts 13:48 passage you quoted speaks of being "appointed," but the Greek word is not a passive, but a middle/passive, meaning that it equally well means that their believing gave themselves an appointment for eternal life. But while Calvinist translators tweak the text as Luther did, readers' eyes glaze over when we have to look at the grammar of the middle voice of a participle to show the bias.

- Romans 7 & 8: Having, "been delivered from the law" (Rom. 7:4) Paul now describes how we walk "according to the Spirit" so that "the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled" (Rom. 8:4).

SO NOW OUR QUESTION: IS GOD JUSTIFIED IN CASTING AWAY ISRAEL? Well:

- Romans NINE: "my countrymen according to the flesh..." Rom. 9:3

- Rom. 9:4 "...Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law..."

- Rom. 9:6 "they are not all Israel who are of Israel"

- Rom. 9:13 quoting MALACHI 1: As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."

.....Malachi 1 is about the two nations of Israel and Edom (Esau's descendants)

....."the word of the LORD to Israel" Mal. 1:1
 "Was not Esau Jacob's brother? Says the LORD. Yet Jacob I have loved" Mal. 1:2 (Jacob is Israel)
 "But Esau I have hated." Mal. 1:3 (Esau's name was changed to Edom, father of the Edomite nation)
 "Even though Edom has said, we have been impoverished" We, because Edom is a nation, not an individual.
 Paul quotes from Malachi, which is about two nations, Israel and Esau (the Edomites; just read the book)
 Yet, " My name shall be great among the Gentiles..." Mal. 1:11
 And in Malachi God goes on to condemn. . . JACOB, Yes, to condemn Israel whom he had loved
 "Because you have not kept My ways, but have shown partiality" Mal. 2:9 (God hates partiality, which is the same as Calvinist election. He even said, " if you show partiality, you commit sin" James 2:9; and "the LORD your God... shows no partiality" Deut. 10:17, for when Peter saw that God saved the uncircumcised Cornelius, he said, "I perceive that God shows no partiality" (Acts 10:34)
 And finally in Malachi it is to Israel that God warns, "Behold, I will rebuke your descendants, and spread refuse on your faces" Mal. 2:3; Now back to Romans.
 - Rom. 9:12-13 "it was said to her, 'The older shall serve the younger.' As it is written, 'Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.'"
 - Dr. Bray, God Himself gave that prophecy and He says it is about two peoples, not the individuals:
 Genesis 25:23: And the LORD said to her: "Two nations are in your womb, Two peoples shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other, And THE OLDER SHALL SERVE THE YOUNGER." When Paul quoted this (he wrote, "to those who know the law"), his readers knew these biblical references were not about babies, but about nations.
 - Rom. 9:15 "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy" (Calvinists append the word, arbitrarily to this in their interpretation, but in Scripture, God has mercy on those who heed his warnings)
 - Rom. 9:21 "Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?" This is explicitly from Jer. 18 where God repeatedly said, " I speak concerning a nation" and His warning there was ignored by "covenant theologian" priests of the Old Testament who dismissed God's threat to cut off Israel because, "the law shall not perish from the priest... nor the word from the prophet (Jer. 18:18). That is, we have God's covenant, and since God can't change, we can ignore these threats that He may not give us the kingdom He promised. Today's covenant theologians ignore the same threat that God gives in Romans 11:21 regarding "the dispensation of Grace to the Gentiles."
 Dr. Bray, Romans 9 to 11 is explicitly about God cutting off Israel, temporarily, and grafting in Gentiles
 - Rom. 9:23-24 "the vessels of mercy... not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles
 - I will call them My people, who were not My people,
 - Rom. 9:30-31 "Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained... but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained..."
 - Rom. 9:32 Why? Not ARBITRARILY, as Calvinism teaches, but as God explains what happened to Israel: "Why? Because they did not seek it by faith"
 - Rom. 9:33 "I lay in Zion [Israel] a stumbling stone" but "whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame"
 - Romans 10: "my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved" (Rom. 10:1). So now, in the Body of Christ, "there is no distinction between Jew and Greek" (Rom. 10:12) For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." 10:13 " But I say, did Israel not know?" 10:19; " But to Israel he says"
 - Romans 11: " What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks" 11:7; and regarding Israel being cut off, "their being cast away is the reconciling of the world" because the nations no longer go through Israel to be saved.

Mr. Enyart,

You didn't answer my question regarding John 6:44, rather you brought up a different point regarding what drawing "all" means. Please answer the question that I posed regarding the verse which is predicated on the Father "dragging" us to Christ:

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me drags him. And I will raise him up on the last day. (Joh 6:44)

How can it be said that we choose Christ when we are told that the Father "drags" us to Him?

You go on to quote John 12:32 and 1 Tim 2:3-4 as if they are part of the same context...but they are not. 1 Tim 2 speaks of God desiring to save all in the same way that it speaks of us praying for all...the sense is for all kinds of people including kings (v.2) rather than for every particular person in the world. If it was a reference to every particular person in the world our prayers would be so time consuming that we would have time for little, if anything, else.

Christ being lifted up and drawing all to Him in John 12:32 is a reference to all nations of the earth. Prior to Christ salvation was of the Jews through Israel. After Christ salvation is not bound by national borders any longer, but opened up to all who

are in the world. This is evidenced by John 12:47 where Christ says that He comes to save "the world" (i.e. all nations).

Then you try to prove something in Jn 6:44 by using the unrelated passage of Rom 2:15, but because of the way you quote it you make it appear that it is related.

Your post: For God draws all men by "the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness"

The actual verse: They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them (Rom 2:15)

We can see that you set it up to seem as though the verse spoke of how God draws men...but the full verse shows us that it is really speaking of how the work of the law is shown to work in someone's conscience.

So even though you speak highly of context and proper hermeneutics, the way in which you use Scripture text shows that you don't practice either.

Your treatment of 2 Pet 3:9 is more of the same. I will post the whole verse here so that folks can see what i mean:

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. (2Pe 3:9)

The key to understanding the context of the verse is that God is "patient toward you"...in other words, Peter is referring directly to believers. The passage is not about the reprobate but about the elect. Therefore the "all" that will come to repentance are the elect...and it will happen because God is patient in bringing them to repentance.

The Potter and Clay of Romans 9 is not applied in the same way as the Jer 18 passage. Yes, Jer 18 is referring to God's sovereignty over nations, but in Rom 9 Paul expands that to God's sovereignty over salvation...over the reprobate and the elect. This is specifically declared in vv.22-23 with the two classes of people: vessels of wrath, vessels of mercy.

You again play loose with the text by saying: So God did not complete the first vessel that He was attempting to make, and so "made it again, into another vessel." For dishonor.

The passage itself tells us that the very purpose of making the vessels of wrath was to show God's wrath and power in their destruction...nothing in there about making it again:

What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, (Rom 9:22)

I have no idea why you put quotes around "made it again, into another vessel"...perhaps you could tell us where you are quoting from.

Dr. Bray, answering your question may lead readers to will see that God's use of the potter and the clay is the opposite of the Calvinist's use.

You wrote, "I have no idea why you put quotes around "made it again, into another vessel"...perhaps you could tell us where you are quoting from."

Your ESV version on the potter and the clay account that Paul is quoting says: "the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel... 'Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel'" Jer. 18

That's similar to my NKJV: "the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel..."

This is exactly opposite to the Calvinist interpretation which claims that God initially intended to make people into vessels of wrath, whereas God shows that He sought to make them into vessels of honor to bless them but the clay was marred, that

is, they rejected God's will (see Lk 7:30; 1 Thes. 4:1). God interprets His warning to Israel that while He wants to give them a kingdom, if they rebel, He will not do what "He said" He would; He won't do what "He thought" He would do. Rom. 9 -11 shows the fulfillment of this warning. Jesus repeated this warning: "for three years" He had come to "this fig tree" and finding no fruit (faith) He said, "Cut it down." But the vineyard's keeper said He would fertilize it and so give it one more year. Then if there's no fruit, "after that you can cut it down" (Lk 13).

Yes our debate shows that Romans 9 is understood in two ways Dr. Bray. One way, as interpreted by the teachings of Calvin (and others who make Immutability their ultimate hermeneutic, chief of all the OMNIs and IMs). And the other way is as interpreted by God's biblical attributes (Living, Personal, Relational, Good, and Loving), and the scriptural context of Paul's proof texts (which he uses to show that God is justified in cutting of Israel and grafting in the Gentiles (Rom. 9-11).

So here are the these two Romans 9 interpretations:

Romans 9 Interpreted by Calvin: God hates billions of human beings from when they were babies in the womb creating and predestining them to commit all the filth, and adulteries, and blasphemies, and cruelties, and rapes of children, and horrors, decreeing all this so that they could do nothing else so that He would be justified in showing His power by punishing them for all eternity, and that, for doing what He created them to do and giving them no other possibility. This is all because Calvinists prioritize God's immutability and power and knowledge above Him being Personal, and Good and Loving. If there were any freedom in God's creatures,

Romans 9 Interpreted by Context of Paul's Quotes: After 2,000 years of the nation of Israel being God's covenant people, there is a shock among believing Jews, and a difficulty among believing Gentiles, in understanding that God has cut off Israel (partly and temporarily) and grafted in both Jews and Gentiles without distinction. So every time the "apostle to the Gentiles" meets with the apostles from Jerusalem, there are tensions (Gal. 2; Acts 15; Acts 21; 2 Pet. 3) that the Holy Spirit makes sure are resolved.

Dr. Bray, you wrote, "The Potter and Clay of Romans 9 is not applied in the same way as the Jer 18 passage." I believe you say this because of your commitment to Calvinism, prioritizing the Greek and Latin philosophical OMNIs and IMs, i.e, the quantitative attributes of God (how much change, power, knowledge, presence, emotion, does God have), above the qualitative attributes. The Bible often describes God as being Living, Personal, Relational, Good and Loving. Might doesn't make right, but right makes might. So God's goodness is the foundation of His power and authority, and the banner of victory is of the Lamb slain Rev. 5:12. For "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne [that is, of God's authority and power]" Ps. 89:14.

So to further contrast your Calvinist interpretation of Romans 9 with one based on the context of the scriptures Paul is quoting, I'm going to abbreviate my earlier points in our overview of Romans and adding new text from the epistle and comment on your interpretation.

So, is Romans about God condemning babies to hell or about God being JUSTIFIED in casting away Israel and the grafting in the Gentiles?

ROMANS ONE: "Jesus... born of the seed of David according to the flesh... that I might have some fruit among you... Gentiles. ... for the Jew first, and also for the Greek [Greek means Gentile throughout]."

ROMANS TWO "God... 'will render...' eternal life to those who... seek for glory, honor, and immortality... of the Jew first and also of the Greek... to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God. ... For... Gentiles... are a law to themselves" [by the God-given conscience; Paul then compares Gentiles to him who is] "called a Jew..." [with these phrases concluding the chapter] "For circumcision... your circumcision has become uncircumcision. Therefore, if an uncircumcised man... his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? ...will not the physically uncircumcised... For he is not a Jew... nor is circumcision... but he is a Jew... and circumcision is that of the heart..." [Of course Calvinists have a "God hates most babies" view of this, but if the reader can stay with this Romans outline a bit more, he'll see that's not at all Paul's point.]

ROMANS THREE " What advantage then has the Jew... Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? ... Certainly not! ... As it is written: 'THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED in Your words' " [This open theist understanding of Romans is that God is justified in turning from Israel's national covenant to a the covenant with Jews and Gentiles in the Body of Christ. Dr. Bray interprets this as teaching that God inflicts wrath arbitrarily on one and not another, not based on heeding Him, but by condemning most children who have done neither good nor evil, only because of partiality toward one child and the other. Calvinists try to prove this by taking verses about God's plan for groups and claiming they apply to individuals. Whereas God draws all men to Himself counseling that all be saved. Pau then continues:]

- "Are we [the Gentiles] better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin... Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also..." (etc.).

ROMANS FOUR: "Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also?... How then was [Abraham's righteousness] accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. And he received the sign of circumcision... of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised... and the father of circumcision... the heir of the world... Abraham... his seed... heirs... those who are of the law... those who are of the faith... Abraham, who is the father of us all... (as it is written, 'I have made you a father of many nations')"

[Paul deals heavily with God being justified in turning from the Circumcision to the Uncircumcision (Israel to the Body). This primary theme is obscured by Calvinists looking for proof texts, distracting their students from the actual story and meaning of Romans.]]

ROMANS FIVE & SIX: About being "justified by faith" And, "when we [Gentiles] were enemies we were reconciled to God..." [For Rom. 11:15: Israel was cut off, that "their being cast away is the reconciling of the world.]

ROMANS SEVEN & EIGHT: "...you also have become dead to the law... having been delivered from the law... "that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who... walk according to... the Spirit."

ROMANS NINE: "my countrymen according to the flesh..."

- "...Israelites, to whom pertain... the covenants"

- "they are not all Israel who are of Israel"

- "As it is written, 'Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.'" [from Malachi]

[Dr. Bray, you say this isn't about two nations but both contexts disagree: (1) the overall book of Romans, and (2) when God said this in Malachi 1, He was speaking of two nations, Israel and the Edomites. You don't permit that understanding because you need this as a proof text that God arbitrarily hates most individuals, the very thing that God condemns Israel for in Malachi, "Because you have not kept My ways, but have shown partiality..." Yet there in Malachi, God rebukes Jacob (Israel) far more than He rebukes Esau. For Esau is called Edom for the Edomites, because his name was changed to Edom, that is, in the Hebrew to "Adam," standing for all the other descendants of Adam, the Gentiles, who were not of God's national covenant with Israel.]

- "it was said to her, 'The older shall serve the younger.' As it is written, 'Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.' "

[Dr. Bray, you insist that these statements in Romans 9 are primarily about individuals and not nations, but Paul is directly quoting God Himself, in the same context of God's verbatim prophecy, about Israel and the Gentiles. For, "the LORD said to her: 'Two NATIONS are in your womb, Two PEOPLES shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other, And THE OLDER SHALL SERVE THE YOUNGER.'" When God says, Dr. Bray, that is prophecy is of two nations, why do you say that it should not be taken that way? Surely Romans is replete with the theme of Israel and the Gentiles, as is Romans 9 itself. So can you acknowledge, even as a Calvinist, that though you disagree, still, it is a reasonable, biblically-based interpretation to say this is about two nations?]

- "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy"

[Dr. Bray, you interpret this as though the Scriptures appended the word "arbitrarily" to this, but they NEVER do. God's mercy is always offered to those who heed His warnings. Always. But you justify adding the word "arbitrarily" to this giving of mercy by referring to the prophecies of Jacob and Esau above, which are about God selecting one nation for a task, not one baby to send to hell and another to save. For through Israel God wanted to bless all the nations, for "I will make you a great nation... and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:2-3). but He did not in their interpretation, but in Scripture, God has mercy on those who heed his warnings). This is the story of the entire Bible, which by the way is the third of the seven hermeneutics I'd like to introduce soon.]

- "So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy."

[Dr. Bray, after rejecting God's warnings, Israel could not by force of their own will hold off God's hand of judgment. They could not unilaterally, by force of their will, maintain their national covenant and put off God's righteous judgment. God decides to whom He will show mercy. And He does not make that decision arbitrarily. As throughout Scripture, He shows mercy to those who heed Him. But Calvinists fear to acknowledge that the Romans 9 verses are about two nations, because then we all see how God decides to give out mercy. "For I, the LORD... (show) mercy... to those who love Me," (Deut. 5:9-10). But Calvinists cannot consider this, because they prioritize the quantity of God's power and knowledge, and ability to change, above the biblical attributes of Him being personal, relational, good, and loving.]

- "Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?"

[Dr. Bray, you say that Paul cannot be quoting this for it's context about two nations, but it must be about two individuals. You maintain this in spite of the two nations being a primary theme of the whole book of Romans, and especially of Romans 9 – 11. I believe you do this because you Calvinism needs these proof texts, even though, reasonably, they are not about individuals, but about nations. And as with the "first mention principle" harkening back to Jeremiah 18 where Paul is quoting this from, and to Paul's use of this here in Romans, GOD HIMSELF interpreted the potter and the clay teaching. And this is what He said there, that it means: "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?" says the LORD. "[For] so are you in My hand, O house of Israel! The instant I speak CONCERNING A NATION and concerning a kingdom, to destroy it, if that nation... turns from its evil, I will relent [repent] of the disaster THAT I THOUGHT to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a NATION and concerning a kingdom... to plant it, if it does evil... I will relent [repent]... Therefore thus

says the LORD: "Ask now among the Gentiles, who has heard such things? ...Israel has done a very horrible thing." Like all prophetic warnings, God gives this prophecy in hopes that it will not come to pass, for He is a "God of hope" (Rom. 15:13), while of course hope is not possible to God if the future is settled, for "hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?" (Rom. 8:24). But Dr. Bray, the Jews rejected God's prophetic warning and said in Jer. 18, "let us devise plans against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest... nor the word from the prophet," all because they downplayed God being free, and as a Person, God has a will, and because He is free, and has a will (and is eternally, un-inexhaustibly creative), therefore the future cannot be settled, but must be open, because He is free, and that is why God was able to cut off Israel, as He had warned and the New Testament extensively details.]

- "For who has resisted His will?" [For no unbeliever, nor national Israel, by force, can stay God's hand of judgment.]
- "the vessels of mercy... not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles"
- "As He says also in Hosea [which is evidently and undeniably about national Israel], 'I will call them My people, who were not My people ... And it shall come to pass... You are not My people' [which Paul applies to the Jews and the Gentiles]
- "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved" [For Israel was cut off partly, and temporarily, Rom. 11:25)
- "Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained...
- "but Israel... has not attained..."

[Why, Dr. Bray, would you say that national Israel has not attained salvation? With Calvinism, you would say that Israel has not attained, not because of anything they have done, but because God eternally decreed that they would reject His warnings. That is, through partiality, God did not elect them to salvation, so "Israel... has not attained." But that Calvinist interpretation is explicitly the opposite of what ROMANS NINE here teaches:

- "Why? Because they did not seek it by faith... [So therefore God said:]
- "I lay in Zion [Israel] a stumbling stone" but "whoever believes on Him [Jew and Gentile] will not be put to shame"

ROMANS TEN: [Dr. Bray, while you say this isn't all about national Israel being cast away, Paul continues in Romans 10 from the first verse:]

- "my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved."
- "For they [national Israel]... seeking to establish their own righteousness..."
- "For [now] whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." [Because Israel has been cut off, so:]
- "For there is [now] no distinction between Jew and Greek" [For AGAIN:]
- "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved" [Jew or Gentile]
- "But I say, did Israel not know?"

Mr. Enyart,

Thank you for telling me that you got the quote regarding the potter from Jer 18. Please give the reference for your quotes when you make them in the future as it is a huge help for me to not have to figure out where you are quoting from. Also, i would appreciate the use of verses rather than only the chapter numbers...it helps to expedite the process.

Since the quote referred to Jeremiah 18 rather than from Romans 9, my last post which pointed out that these passages have different contexts is enough and i don't feel compelled to have to revisit that issue...but i will for clarity sake.

Romans 9 speaks specifically about making two types of vessels out of one lump of clay (v.21). The picture is of a potter taking from one lump to make an honorable vessel, and from that same lump to make a dishonorable vessel. It is not a picture of the potter remaking the one vessel into another type of vessel.

Lk 7:30 tells us that God's counsel was rejected. This brings up a distinction between God's prescriptive and decretive will. God does command that all repent and believe in Christ prescriptively, but He does not will such decretively. So yes, the folks in Lk 7:30 did reject God's counsel to repent, but they in no way violated God's decretive will that they would be reprobate.

You said: Dr. Bray, you wrote, "The Potter and Clay of Romans 9 is not applied in the same way as the Jer 18 passage." I believe you say this because of your commitment to Calvinism

My reply: My motivation is not faithfulness to Calvin, but rather faithfulness to the text. As pointed out above, Romans 9 is not a mere repetition of Jer 18, rather Paul uses the same imagery within a different context. The words of Romans 9 are evidence enough for my interpretation of the text.

You asked: So, is Romans about God condemning babies to hell or about God being JUSTIFIED in casting away Israel and the grafting in the Gentiles?

My reply: Neither of the two options that you offer are the correct answer. God is telling us of the two different kinds of people that He creates: the elect and the reprobate.

The two kinds of people that God creates in Romans 9 encompass both Jews and Gentiles (v.24). This is what shows us that the potter and clay analogy is speaking of all humanity. It's not a division of Jew and Gentile, rather it's a division between reprobate and elect among both the Jew and the Gentile.

We can't help but look at Romans 9 as something more than mere nationality-type prophecy, rather the crux of it centers on the eternal truths of who are and who are not God's people (v.25, 26, 27, et. al.)

You said: Dr. Bray, you insist that these statements in Romans 9 are primarily about individuals and not nations

My reply: Actually, I insist that the statements of the potter and clay are about both the Jews and the Gentiles because v.24 makes that proposition clear.

It seems that your only focus is on Romans 9, and I would like once again to bring your attention to the question that you have still not answered:

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me drags him. And I will raise him up on the last day. (Joh 6:44)

How can it be said that we choose Christ when we are told that the Father "drags" us to Him?

This is my first foray onto Facebook, so good suggestions Dr. Bray and David, on one post per round. Also, yesterday was church day, and for me that means 5 a.m. till 8:30 p.m., so I hadn't read your post till this morning, and with writing a rushed reply, and then figuring out that MS Word does not count spaces, but Facebook does, I was rushing and cutting to fit it, so I apologize for the few confusing typos.

On Dragging: You wrote, "You didn't answer my question regarding John 6:44" which is translated well in the ESV, which says, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me drags him." If God has irresistible grace, why would He have to drag anyone, as though that would be any more difficult than anything else God has decreed? It seems that taking that word especially literally is more of a problem for Calvinism because you can't drag something unless there is resistance, and if Calvinism is true, then there would be no resistance, for who could resist Him? Here's my open theist understanding of why Jesus used the word drag. The 15 verses I listed stated (1) that God is drawing all men and (2) how He is drawing them. He's drawing every man who comes into the world, and from every nation, to himself God. And those verses explain how God is drawing them, by their conscience, and by the revelation of the Creation, and by Christ being lifted up. But why would Jesus say "drag?" When we see how Christ had to suffer on the cross, in order to draw all men to Him, that explains why Jesus used such an intensive word to describe the Father's effort to draw all men, "dragging" them. For both the Father and the Son suffered greatly to be able to draw us to Him, and when men are moved by that sacrifice, many are moved to gratitude and trust. In more earthly terms, consider a father who found out his daughter went to an immoral spring break, and so he left his work, flew out of town, found her, and brought her home. She was stunned to see her dad there, and realizing his deep concern for her, she quietly returned home with him. Even she would understand his meaning if he said, "No matter how bad that place was, she wasn't going to leave unless I dragged her out of there." We see what the Father went through to save us, and we understand Jesus saying that His Father dragged us from death into life.

The verses I listed declared that God is giving light to all "who come into the world," and drawing all to Christ, and desires all men to be saved. Yes, you disagree with the apparent meaning of those many verses claiming they should be taken differently, for more than half of them I didn't even comment on, but merely quoted. In Romans 2, the function of the law is to convict men of sin and their need for forgiveness. But you seem to suggest that God did not give us our conscience as a means of drawing us toward Him. God is the one, though, who put this law in the hearts of mankind. As Paul said of this law of God, it is, "the law written in their hearts..." Not just of some, but every man's conscience, is revelation from God that He has given to every person under heaven drawing them to Him.

You write: "Lk 7:30 tells us that God's counsel was rejected. This brings up a distinction between God's prescriptive and decretive will."

The New Testament uses two Greek words for God's will. Which do you think refers to prescriptive, and which for decretive?

The two Greek words frequently used for will in the New Testament are (1) thelema, to desire, and (2) boule, a strong determined counsel. Luke 7:30 uses the stronger word boule. In plenty of verses that use this stronger word, Calvinists would say it refers to God's decretive will. For boule is in 1 Cor. 1:11 "predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will" and Acts 2:23 "being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God" Heb. 6:7 "God, determining to show... the immutability of His counsel..." Dr. Bray I think you would agree that you are interpreting this strong word for God's will in the weaker sense, not because the grammar or the lexical meaning of the word requires it, nor the context of the verse or the chapter, but because you have a philosophical commitment to God's utter immutability, utter control, and that He hoards all power never having delegated any power to any creature (even though God calls many of His own created beings "powers," and "principalities," and "thrones," and "authorities," etc.) Boule is interpreted in the weaker way only to defend Calvinism. So when Lk 7:30 says that, "the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves," open theists interpret this not only recognizing that the strongest word in the Bible for God's will is used here, but also, by the entire story of the Bible, repeatedly, throughout, God warns in the strongest terms that men should obey Him, at the same time fully acknowledging the likelihood they will reject His warning. The Bible declares this repeatedly.

Of course Calvinists say that God predestined the lawyers to reject His will. Wow. Lawyers are experts at the circumvention of the law, and I've always enjoyed exposing them. But if Calvinism is true, then no lawyer himself ever conceived for himself how to rob his client, but God thought it up for him, planned it, and decreed it. We know an artist from his art. And actions speak louder than words. That's what Jesus said in Mat. 21:28-31, for one son said he would not obey, but then did, and the other said he would obey, but then did not. And Matthew reports the answer to Jesus' question, "Which did the will of his father?" "The first." So, if God says once that He hates divorces, yet then fills the world with batterers, and abandonment, and deceit, and adulteries and hundreds of millions of divorces, His actions speak louder than words. When we show liberals photos of aborted children, they become angry because the picture exposes what it is that they actually support. There may be readers of this debate who don't realize how far Calvinism goes, and they should be aware of its claims, and understand that many Calvinists get angry when you show what they believe. Dr. Bray, I know that you actually believe, and I'm sad for this, that of every perverse pornography video ever made, that you believe God orchestrated it, in His mind, before the foundation of the earth. For every video molesting a child, you believe that our Holy God, from eternity past, determined how many men would violate the young boy, and how many times a little girl would be tormented, and how many minutes the porn video would run. And you believe that God did this for His glory and pleasure. You only attribute these atrocities to the mind of God because you elevate the quantitative, philosophical attributes of the OMNIs and IMs above the qualitative, biblical attributes of God being Living, Personal, Relational, Good and Loving. Why? Because to remain ALL POWERFUL, you reason, God cannot delegate any power, to any creature, to any principality or power, or to any man, because if He did, He would have less power, and even worse, He would change. The constant emphasis on these quantitative attributes of God reduces our view of God to a mathematical equation. How much power? How little change? How much presence? How little emotion? How much knowledge? God in Scripture subordinates such matters to His qualitative attributes. For goodness is the foundation of His power.

You said: you can't drag something unless there is resistance

My reply: That's not true. You can drag a dead body, and there's no resistance at all from the dead. Also consider that irresistible grace is speaking of man's inability to resist what God is doing while the Father dragging us to Christ (Jn 6:44) is speaking of God's work in salvation. So while they may be the same coin, they are different sides of it.

You said: The 15 verses I listed stated (1) that God is drawing all men and (2) how He is drawing them. He's drawing every man who comes into the world, and from every nation, to himself God

My reply: I've actually shown that your understanding of God drawing every man to himself is illegitimate. You have yet to defend your understanding against my criticism, and just restating it is not really a defense.

You said: those verses explain how God is drawing them, by their conscience, and by the revelation of the Creation, and by Christ being lifted up

My reply: I've also already shown how you misrepresented the verses that you claim show God drawing men by their conscience. You have not defended your position against my criticism and yet you continue with the claim.

If you are not able to defend these views against my criticism you should cease from representing them as if they were accepted truths.

You ask: But why would Jesus say "drag?"

My reply: Jesus doesn't drag...the Father does. Jesus and the Father are not the same person within the Godhead.

The Father drags because we are dead in our sins and trespasses (Eph 2:1).

You say: In more earthly terms, consider a father who found out his daughter went to an immoral spring break, and so he left his work, flew out of town, found her, and brought her home. She was stunned to see her dad there, and realizing his deep concern for her, she quietly returned home with him

My reply: Rather, it would be as if the girl in question passed out drunk and the father had to drag her back home.

One of the problems with your interpretation of the John 6:44 "drag" is that you don't consider the context of the passage. The context is Christ telling the crowd why some don't believe in Him even though He's done such marvelous works (v.36). Jesus assures us that all who believe in the Son will be saved (v.40). Then upon hearing their disbelief (v.42), He tells them why they don't believe...because they are not being dragged by the Father (v.44).

You said: Not just of some, but every man's conscience, is revelation from God that He has given to every person under heaven drawing them to Him.

My reply: You have yet to show this in Scripture.

You ask: The New Testament uses two Greek words for God's will. Which do you think refers to prescriptive, and which for decretive?

My reply: You're asking the wrong question. It's not the word that determines whether it is prescriptive or decretive, it's the context surrounding the word.

I also think that you are looking at it wrong when you say that one is a stronger will and one is a weaker will. Let me try to explain the concept with a little more detail...

The word "will" is used in two different ways in Scripture. In one sense God is said to will something volitionally. This is God's will properly speaking. "God works all things after the counsel of His own will. (Eph 1:11)" There is also the extended use of the word "will" when a certain course of action is said to be the will of God. "This is the will of God concerning you, even your sanctification. (1 Thess 4:3)" In this latter sense the word "will" is being used morally, not volitionally. The two words may be used without contradiction or confusion if we keep in mind that the decretive will refers to what SHALL be and the prescriptive will concerns what SHOULD be.

The prescriptive will is not God's will in a proper sense as He doesn't will it to happen, but demands it of us.

You say: you have a philosophical commitment to God's utter immutability, utter control, and that He hoards all power never having delegated any power to any creature

My reply: I do have a commitment to God's utter immutability and sovereignty. But you go too far in saying that i deny any delegation of power. Rather i understand that God delegates power, just not in a way that nullifies His sovereignty.

You say: open theists interpret this not only recognizing that the strongest word in the Bible for God's will is used here, but also, by the entire story of the Bible, repeatedly, throughout, God warns in the strongest terms that men should obey Him

My reply: I hope you see that this actually proves my point of the two kinds of wills of God since you yourself used the word "should."

You say: if Calvinism is true, then no lawyer himself ever conceived for himself how to rob his client, but God thought it up for him, planned it, and decreed it

My reply: You show a lack of understanding Calvinism in this statement. God does ordain all things that come to pass, but He does so through secondary means as well as primary. In your example God would have ordained the lawyers to think up, plan, and execute their sins by their own choice and decision.

You say: For every video molesting a child, you believe that our Holy God, from eternity past, determined how many men would violate the young boy, and how many times a little girl would be tormented, and how many minutes the porn video would run. And you believe that God did this for His glory and pleasure

My reply: I do believe that God is in control, even of these kinds of terrible atrocities. And God will have glory in the end when the culprits are forever punished in the lake of fire. And knowing that God is in control gives purpose while thinking the sinner himself is in control throws any hope of purpose out the window.

But you must understand the difference between primary and secondary causes before thinking so harshly about Calvinists. From the way you pose your statements it doesn't appear that you've actually studied Calvinism, so my question to you: In what way have you studied Calvinism?

Dr. Bray, let's look at your two commitments. First, you deny you interpret Scripture by your commitment to Calvinism. Second, you admit your commitment to utter immutability.

Commitment to Calvinism

DB: You said: Dr. Bray... I believe you say this because of your commitment to Calvinism
DB: My reply: My motivation is not faithfulness to Calvin, but rather faithfulness to the text

Dr. Bray, as president of The North American Reformed Seminary, your TNARS website says: "We are committed to the Westminster... Confession and Catechisms as being a proper interpretation of scripture."

So, when you see 80 excerpts from Paul in Romans indicating that he is writing about God turning from Israel to the Gentiles, you reject all of that biblical material. Why? You reject that because of your commitment to the Calvinistic Westminster Confession.

A TNARS Bible lesson rightly says to "interpret Scripture based upon Scripture." But the Reformed movement has such an intense commitment to Calvinism that when Paul quotes from Jeremiah and Malachi, Dr. Bray, you won't consider that Paul's references will help you understand his point. Why not? Because Calvinists really want proof texts for God hating reprobate babies.

Commitment to Immutability

DB: My reply: I do have a commitment to God's utter immutability

This is philosophical commitment, Dr. Bray, is the basis of Calvinism. Just as the Scriptures overwhelmingly show that Romans is about nations (not babies), so too the Bible shows that God changes, immeasurably:

GOD THE SON was not always a man. He "became flesh" Jn 1:14. "Became" is a change word. We don't want to deny the fundamental reality of the Incarnation. Further, the Incarnation is not just a figure of speech, and shows that God changes. He changes because He is alive. The biblical attributes of God being living, personal, relational, good, and loving openly embrace God's changes. The quantitative OMNIs and IMs can hardly stand to admit that God changes. To prove that God changes, we don't need an obscure verse from Nahum, but the Gospel itself: the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection. The Living God differs from an utterly immutable one and from an unchanging stone idol. God the Son took "the form of a servant, and... humbled Himself" Phil 2:7-8. Humbled is a change word. God the Son lowered Himself beneath His previous stature to become the Son of Man. He was not eternally the son of Man. And that's good because then His existence would depend upon Man. Calvinists struggle with the Incarnation (Phil. 2). They've argued that it was Christ's human nature that changed, not His divine nature. But it wasn't Christ's humanity that "became flesh," nor His humanness that emptied itself to become man. "God was manifested in the flesh" 1 Ti 3:16. The pagan Greeks argued that anything perfect cannot change. That's foolishness. For God the Son became something greater still! For He must increase. Then Christ, true man and true God, suffered for us Hb 2:18; 5:7-8. Actually. Calvinists claim that vast portions of Scripture are only symbolic and figures of speech. Dr. Bray, you agree that the Son's suffering was not a figure of speech. And it was the "Son" who "suffered" Hb 5:8, who "endured the cross" Hb 12:2. For "the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Is 53:6). Really. The Father "made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us" 2 Co 5:21. That was a change. And "Christ has redeemed us... having become a curse for us" Ga 3:13. That was terribly new. And Jesus experienced death, that is, separation, for He died

Mt 27:50. And this was the "only begotten Son" whom God gave to save us Jn 3:16; Zc 12:10. For "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" 2 Co 5:19. The cross was a singularity. No other event will ever reach that level of change. Dr. Bray, as you interpret the Bible, you admit your commitment to the quantitative, philosophical concept of utter immutability, which concept, if true, would disprove the entire story of the Bible.

GOD THE FATHER "increased" His "favor" as Jesus grew Lk 2:52. He later sacrificed His Son for our sin. That was change. The Holy Spirit was called upon to vindicate Jesus, who was "justified [by] the Spirit" 1 Ti 3:16. That's new. Then, "God the Father... raised Him from the dead" Ga 1:1. These real changes save us! Change is a necessary part of life. And since God is alive, and calls Himself the "Living God" (NKJ, 30x), He must be able to change, as He does! The definitions for "living" include active, moving, animation, growth, response. And He can change in any and all ways that He wants to change, while He always remains committed to righteousness. The epitome of limiting God is for a Calvinist to deny that He can change.

GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT experiences change when, by our sin, we "grieve the Holy Spirit" Ep 4:30. All of Scripture repudiates this quantitative doctrine of impassibility that claims that God has no emotion. Trying to prop up utter immutability, which is their foundational doctrine, Calvinists have long taught impassibility. Open theism is enabling Christians everywhere to discover an actual two-way relationship with God. OT is gradually doing away with a nagging question, a question never raised by reading the Bible's teachings on prayer, but is ALWAYS raised by Calvinist teaching: "Then why pray?" Just as the printing press weakened the hold of priests over parishioners who now had Bibles, so too Open Theism benefits from the information age. For previously theologians cloistered themselves in ivory towers but now they have to actually defend their Greek philosophy before those in the pews who can Google biblical rebuttals. As Open Theism helps Christians rediscover our Relational God, impassibility will itself pass away, as fewer and fewer theologians will be willing to defend it. In our debate I'm quoting only the Bible to defend Open Theism. But to illustrate the damage done by the OMNIs and IMs, consider C.S. Lewis, who I love, but sadly he wrote in "Miracles" (1960, p. 92) that, "We correctly deny that God has passions... He cannot be affected by love..." Where in the world did Lewis get this from? From the greatest commandment? From the second? No. Not from Scripture. But from a commitment to Greek philosophy that turns God into a mathematical equation with pluses and minuses, how much, and how little, requiring yet more swaths of Scripture to be viewed as figurative. The Father and the Holy Spirit eternally change also as they think, act, and relate to each other. God changed when He became the Creator; and in relating to His creatures. And the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary and fertilized one of her eggs so that true God would become true man. He had never done that before. In the most extraordinary of ways, God changes. For "He became their Savior" Is. 63:8.

The very story of the Bible crushes the philosophical, quantitative attribute of "utter" immutability. Let's call that General Immutability, and contrast it with a biblical concept that we'll call Special Immutability. God changes not in His goodness. And that is because of His fierce commitment to truth and righteousness.

TNARS admits that Calvinism is your interpretive framework, and you admit your commitment to utter immutability, which I think clouds the overall story of God in the Bible, and forces you to see many scriptures as a series of disjointed proof texts. Utter immutability wreaks havoc with anyone's ability to know the chief attributes of God, which are not found in Plato but in the Bible: that He is Living, Personal, Relational, Good, and Loving. Quite the opposite of a God who creates reprobate babies to whom He gives no option other than to be punished eternally so that He can show how great He is. For that's what you get when you reduce God to a mathematical equation of OMNIs and IMs.

Immutability is wrong so Calvinism is wrong.

Mr. Enyart,

Though a slight distraction from the actual debate, let me clarify my commitments in the hope of bringing greater understanding of my position(s):

I do not interpret Scripture because of my commitment to Calvinism and the Westminster Standards, rather I adhere to Calvinism and the Westminster Standards because of my commitment to Scripture.

I would further point out that I did not "reject all of that biblical material," but rather interpreted consistently with proper hermeneutics.

As an example, the basic problem with your Rom 9 interpretation is that you are using a hermeneutic based on Jer 18. The immediate text of Romans 9 should directly impact the hermeneutic, while Jer 18 should only have a derivative impact on it.

You said: Calvinists really want proof texts for God hating reprobate babies.

My reply: I can't imagine why you keep bringing up babies, even after i made clear that Romans 9 was not primarily about babies, but about two kinds of people (regardless of age): Elect and Reprobate.

You said: the Bible shows that God changes, immeasurably

My reply: I will let the readers judge for themselves whether God is immutable or immeasurably changeable. I trust that any who have read the Scriptures will condemn your view speedily.

You go on to try and prove your point by showing that God the Son was not always a man. Well, let me just say that the second person of the Trinity, the Son, is still not a man...rather Jesus Christ is both man and God. Since His incarnation He has been both the Son of Man and the Son of God. But as the Son of God He has never changed.

God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it? (Num 23:19)

"For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. (Mal 3:6)

Your "proof verse" is Jn 1:14 which says that "the Word was made flesh." I pray that you are not trying to tell us that God was created at this point in history.

You said: He changes because He is alive. The biblical attributes of God being living, personal, relational, good, and loving openly embrace God's changes

My reply: You presume that those attributes of God require change, and i would challenge you in that. Just because you presume something doesn't make it true.

You said: The Living God differs from an utterly immutable one and from an unchanging stone idol

My reply: Comparing the immutable God to a stone idol either shows the depth of your ignorance concerning the subject or the lengths you will go to in order to paint opposing views as somehow idolatrous.

You said: GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT experiences change when, by our sin, we "grieve the Holy Spirit" Ep 4:30.

My reply: This is a clear case of describing God through anthropathism. I would no more think that God changes because of the analogy given in Eph 4:30 than i would think that God has a hand because of the anthropomorphic description given in 1 Sam 5:11.

My question to you at the end of my last post was not rhetorical. I think it would be helpful for you to answer it in order to give more context to our debate...

In what way have you studied Calvinism?

Dr. Bray, I agree with you and some of our Reformed readers that you did not "reject all of that biblical material" in Romans. I'm sorry I truncated my point and made it seem otherwise. Clearly you agree that some Romans verses are about Israel and the Gentiles; so many explicitly say so. Here's what you reject though that I've argued from the start:

You reject that Romans 9 is about Israel and the Gentiles. The evidence for this is Paul's dozens of Old Testament references and quotes from within that single chapter, and not only from Jeremiah, but from Malachi, and from Genesis: WITH ROMANS 9:12 QUOTING GENESIS 25:23 WHERE GOD HIMSELF EXPLAINS THE IDENTICAL PROPHECY THAT PAUL QUOTES, SAYING, "TWO NATIONS ARE IN YOUR WOMB, TWO PEOPLES... and THE OLDER SHALL SERVE THE YOUNGER." That's what you reject. To retain a few Calvinist proof texts Dr. Bray you reject that A PRIMARY THEME throughout Romans is God turning from Israel to the Gentiles, which theme climaxes in Romans 11. Even the Potter and the Clay scripture, which you say we cannot interpret by the Jeremiah 18 scripture, concludes with "the Jews" and "the Gentiles" Rom. 9:22.

THE AUTHOR OF SIN

BE: For every video [made] molesting a child, you believe that our Holy God, from eternity past, determined how many men

would violate the young boy

DB: I do believe that God is in control, even of these kinds of terrible atrocities. And God will have glory in the end when the culprits are forever punished...

Dr. Bray, as a credentialed Calvinist, thank you for acknowledging what we regularly hear every Calvinist in the pews denying (in fact, they call it blasphemous): that Calvinism teaches that God Himself filled the world with filth and wickedness, including the torture of innocents and rape of children. You admit that Calvinism teaches that all such evil was conceived in the mind of God before any wicked person was even born, in fact, before the foundation of the world. Yet this you should now admit also, that God alone decreed all this without any other primary or secondary cause decreeing it, and all this wickedness for His glory and pleasure (Is. 46:10).

CLAIMED HOPLESSNESS IF SIN ISN'T DECREED

DB: knowing that God is in control gives purpose while thinking the sinner himself is in control throws any hope of purpose out the window.

Dr. Bray, this is a false dichotomy, implying that there is no conceivable purpose unless God Himself is the producer and director of every porn video, etc.

Here is the purpose. Love. Since love must be freely given, to have the ability to love REQUIRES the ability to hate. Like God with us, a groom treasures his bride's love because he knows she could have given it to another.

IS GOD ETERNALLY CREATIVE? Just as many Calvinists don't realize they are buying into a doctrine that says that God orchestrated the sodomy of every boy raped, they also don't realize that they are buying into God Himself being unable to have a single new thought for all of eternity future. Dr. Bray, can God write a new song? Calvinism says no. For then the future would be different, and that is not allowed because of utter immutability. But if God can no longer create, then there goes immutability, because before the foundation of the world He was able to create, and now He cannot. In reality though, God remains inexhaustibly creative. For He has a will, is free, and creative, so therefore the future is not settled but eternally open.

ROMANS 11 IS EVEN STRONGER: This is the climax of the Romans theme about God turning from Israel to the Gentiles:

- "Has God cast away His people?" [Completely and permanently as Luther said? No, see v. 25.] "Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite..." Rom. 11:1

- "Israel has not obtained what it seeks..." Rom. 11:7

- "But THROUGH THEIR FALL, to provoke them to jealousy, SALVATION HAS COME TO THE GENTILES." Rom. 11:11

[To admit that this is the major theme of Romans that runs through chapter 9, you'd lose some Calvinist proof texts. God had wanted the nations to be blessed through Israel, but they've been blessed IN SPITE OF Israel. Now God hopes that we will make national Israel jealous for Him, because their God is now in love with those who were "not my people," Hosea and Rm. 9:25]

- "their fall [Israel's] is riches for the world" Rom. 11:12

- "For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles..." Rom. 11:13

- "For if their [Israel] being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?" Rom. 11:15

- "Because of unbelief they were broken off" Rom. 11:20

[That's when Israel lost their national covenant, and now God holds their kingdom in abeyance, but they were not broken off by God's arbitrary decree but because they rejected His warnings (assuming their covenant meant that God couldn't cut them off, Jer. 18:18). They ignored that He is a Person with a Will, who values love more than prophecy and knowledge, as Paul wrote, if I have "prophecy... and all knowledge [omniscience]... but have not love, I am nothing." And therefore He would not give the promised kingdom to those who hated the King.]

[Next, even though Luther taught that God is forever done with national Israel:]

- For "they also [national Israel, who's covenant was cut off], if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again." Rom. 11:23

- "For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant... that blindness IN PART has happened to Israel UNTIL the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." Rom. 11:25

- "Concerning the gospel they [national Israel] are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they [national Israel] are beloved for the sake of the fathers." Rom. 11:28

Being chosen is not what it's cracked up to be. According to the biblical record, the vast majority of the chosen people went to hell (Gen. 12 - Mal. 4). The main meaning of chosen is to be called for a task. Most of the chosen priests went to hell. For "The priests, the Levites; ALL THE TRIBE OF LEVI; shall have no part nor inheritance with Israel [for] the LORD is their inheritance... For... GOD HAS CHOSEN HIM [Levi] out of all your tribes to stand TO MINISTER in the name of the LORD, HIM AND HIS SONS FOREVER" (Deut. 18:1-2, 5). Yet most Levites and priests who were chosen by God rejected Him (Is.

28:7; Jer. 2:8, etc.), and for rebellion God even killed some of the "chosen" priests who were called by name, "anointed," and "consecrated" (Lev. 10:1-2; Num. 3:2-4; 1 Sam. 2:27, 30, 34-35). Even many of the prophets went to hell (Jr. 5:31; 23:11; etc.). And of God's chosen kings, the LORD "repented" (the standard Hebrew word for repent) and REMOVED Saul from the throne, even though, "the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel FOREVER" (1 Sam. 13:13) but Saul rebelled, and God's response WAS AN ACTION. So it CANNOT BE A FIGURE OF SPEECH Dr. Bray, because ACTIONS ARE NOT FIGURES OF SPEECH (not anthropopathy, or any other kind). "Repent" is said of God dozens of times, and also the Bible says He does not repent like a man (for doing evil) but He repents so often that He is "weary" of it (Jer. 15:6). Being chosen is not what Calvinists say it is, but rather, God chose men and nations (like Jacob and Esau in the womb) for tasks. Whether or not they individually look to Him for salvation is a different matter. For the first Saul of Benjamin, whom God chose in the Old Testament (1 Sam. 9:1, 17), started well under the law but ended up terribly, whereas the second Saul of Benjamin (Rom. 11:1), Paul whom God chose (Gal. 1:15) in the New Testament, started off terribly, but under grace was blessed beyond measure. Calvinist doctrine makes it hard for people to see these sweeping truths.

- "For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." [So because God called Israel, He will one day return to Israel.] Rom. 11:29

Mr. Enyart,

I will let your last post stand on its own without interacting with it here since most of what you've written in the post has already been dealt with. Rather i will simply post on a few things that have yet to be addressed by you, giving you an opportunity to address them before my closing post.

1. In what way have you studied Calvinism?

2. How does the framework from which you interpret Scripture explain away these passages...

And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed (ordained) to eternal life believed. (Act 13:48)

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Rom 8:29-30)

even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, (Eph 1:4-5)

3. As far as sin being within God's plan, though you have done a good job in arousing emotion by speaking of sodomized children, you have done little in interacting with Scripture. If sin is not in God's plan and He has no part in it, please explain the following...

[The greatest sin of all, Jesus being delivered over to death, was in God's plan] - this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. (Act 2:23)

...shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it? (Amo 3:6)

Thank you David for hosting the debate and Dr. Bray for challenging me with Scripture. As this is my last post, I'll squeeze in some replies and then close. I'd like to respond to all your questions over at the DBC site we launched years ago, TheologyOnLine.com where we have time and room in the tens of thousands of threads there, many by Calvinists.

On the Father "dragging" us, when the debate is over and we go back and read the 15 verses I replied with, even though we have different conclusions, you may see that I did answer. If God had irresistible grace why would He need to drag us? If all is predestined then God would pull no harder to save someone than to make a snowflake fall. Do Calvinists think it's equally hard for God to make snow, make a man rape a child, and to make another man believe? Why would He "pull harder" if it's irresistible? A swat team member read your post and chuckled to me that you must never have dragged a corpse.

How have I studied Calvinism? If I told you which Bible schools I've attended would you judge them by their adherence to the extra-biblical authority of the Westminster Confession? I'd rather you see that I walk with the Lord, love Him, and know the Scriptures. That I read thousands of pages by Calvinist theologians comes across, I think, in my 10-round Open Theism debate at TOL with Dr. Samuel Lamerson, professor of New Testament at D. James' Kennedy's Knox Theological Seminary.

ACTS 13 Again: Who Judged, Who Appointed? God Turns to the Gentiles!

I've replied that the Gentiles "appointed themselves" to eternal life, for the verb is not a passive but a middle/passive. I'll repeat that, because wherever you dig deeper, the more glorious God becomes. I started the debate with Calvinist proof texts because they are often so strong for our side as are these three Acts 13 verses for dispensational open theism:

Acts 13:46 "Then Paul... said, '...since you [Israelites] reject it, and JUDGE YOURSELVES unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.' "

["Judge Yourself" is IDENTICAL GRAMMAR to "appoint" in v. 48, it's a middle/passive and Luke contrasts what the Jews have done in rejecting Christ, judging themselves, to what the Gentiles have done by believing, giving "themselves an appointment for eternal life."]

Acts 13:47 [Israel being cast away is the reconciling of the world] 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.' [Rm. 11:15]

Acts 13:48 "Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed [same as v. 46, APPOINTED THEMSELVES] to eternal life believed."

[This too is a middle/passive and concludes Luke's contrast about Israel and the Gentiles. It's not that anyone was eternally decreed to hell but that those who rejected God's offer JUDGED THEMSELVES and those who believed APPOINTED THEMSELVES. If TNARS is biased to Calvinism, it will teach this verse without explaining the middle voice translation and contrast with v. 46.]

Seven Top Hermeneutics Prioritized

1. God: existence, eternity, and entity Rom 1:20
 2. His Story: the plot, or storyline, of the Bible (i.e., doctrinal details fit within the overall story)
 3. His Nature: His story shows that He is living, personal, relational, good, and loving (includes J.O.N.A.H. & N.O.A.H.)
 4. Christological: the Bible is His Word and Christ-centered
 5. Context prioritized: God's Nature, then His Story; then the covenant; the book; chapter; paragraph; sentence
 6. Literalness: Scripture presents a literal message that contains figures of speech, symbols, poetry, parables
 7. Historical/Grammatical: method emphasizes original languages, cultural and historical setting
- 8-16. Listed at KGOV.com under Bob's Writings.

Arminians and Calvinists both use the historical/grammatical method and by it come to their opposite conclusions. But that method actually shines best when talking to those who think the Bible means whatever they want it to mean. Then you show that God put actual meaning into the text through the words He used in the context of actual history. The H/G method is easily abused by implying that the Bible is only understood by those with arcane and grammatical esoteric knowledge with the right credentials. But God wrote the New Testament not in scholarly Greek but in the common Koine dialect. Further:

1. GOD: To correctly interpret everything (even before the Bible) requires knowing that God exists. Job lived contemporaneously with Jacob's grandchildren, and had no Bible but knew that his wife's advice was wrong by this hermeneutic.
2. STORY: God gave the Bible as a book of stories because unlike grammatical nuances the plot of a story survives translation into a thousand languages. So we interpret each verse to be consistent with the Bible's overall plot. When God repeatedly repents and UNDOES things THAT HE DID, that cannot be a figure of speech because THEY ARE ACTIONS. Actions form parts of a story. The storyline survives even bad translations (watch a foreign language film with no subtitles if you doubt this). That's why I titled my life's work, The Plot.
3. NATURE: God's nature is revealed through the Bible's story. The Flood shows how much He hates sin, and the cross how much He loves us. Jonah and Noah saw God repent and Jonah was like an early Calvinist who God rebuked because he cared more that the prophecy of death would come to pass than he did about the souls of the people. Goodness takes precedence over God's power, and love trumps omniscience Ps 89:14; 1 Cor 13:2.

JONAH: Jehovah's Obvious Nativity Attributes Hermeneutic

The Bible's story shows that God became a man, born in a stable, and the chief attributes of God were all there in that Boy. He was living, personal, relational, good, and loving. Children are such a blessing. Any mom can tell you her baby's attributes, of being living, personal, relational, and loving. And Mary learned about her Baby, conceived by the Holy Spirit, was absolute goodness, not sinning even as He grew. But neither the Christ Child nor the man Jesus exhibited any of the OMNIs and IMs. Immutability was disproved in the Father for as the Lord grew, "Jesus increased... in favor with God" and no rule of grammar says otherwise. Later Jesus, who is God the Son, disavowed omniscience. For "of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." So omniscience, a quantitative attribute (how much) cannot be an essential attribute of God, because then, Jesus would not have been God.

NOAH: Necessarily Obvious Attributes Hermeneutic

Resolves conflicting explanations by selecting interpretations that give precedent to the biblical attributes of God as being living, personal, relational, good, and loving, over contrary explanations derived from commitment to the philosophical attributes of omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, impassible, and immutable. The Bible says that Jesus is the "exact representation" of God. Highlight every verse in the Gospels that you think shows that Jesus has any of the OMNIs or IMs. You may not mark even one verse. But mark every verse that shows Him as living, personal, relational, good, and loving, you'll have to go out... and get a second marker, because you'll run out of ink.

My 11-year-old Michael just asked, "Dad, who do you think will win the debate?" I told him that God could give us an authoritative answer, but we can know who THINKS they won by which side promotes it. :)

Dr. Bray, if you want to join me at TOL, I'll show you how careful biblical hermeneutics easily answer the rest of your Calvinist proof texts, with the story of the Bible jumping off the pages, delivering believers from the teaching that all filth and wickedness originated in God's mind, and showing God, not as a mathematical equation of ALLs and NOTHINGs, but in His most glorious good and loving nature.

I would like to start my closing post by thanking Dr. New for agreeing to mediate this debate and hosting it on his site...also to thank him for thinking of me to be part of this debate, it's been a good experience for me.

I would also like to thank Mr. Enyart for agreeing to debate with me and for his respect for the agreed upon rules during the debate.

I will now close by simply showing that Calvinism is indeed biblical by taking letting God speak through His word regarding the various Calvinist doctrines. I will look at the most common distinctions of Calvinism as found in the acronym, "TULIP."

Total Depravity:

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. (Gen 6:5)

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. (Psa 51:5)

We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. (Isa 64:6)

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? (Jer 17:9)

as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; (Rom 3:10)

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1)

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (1Jn 1:8)

Unconditional Election (to salvation):

Blessed is the one you choose and bring near, to dwell in your courts! We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, the holiness of your temple! (Psa 65:4)

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. (Joh 6:37)

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws [drags] him. And I will raise him up on the last day. (Joh 6:44)

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. (Joh 15:16)

And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed

(ordained) to eternal life believed. (Act 13:48)

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Rom 8:29-30)

So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. (Rom 9:16)

even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, (Eph 1:4-5)

Unconditional Election (to condemnation):

As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." (Rom 9:13)

So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. (Rom 9:18)

Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, (Rom 9:21-22)

and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. (1Pe 2:8)

Limited Atonement (Effective Atonement):

Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. (Isa 53:11)

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." (Mat 1:21)

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (Joh 10:11)

I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. (Joh 17:9)

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. (Act 20:28)

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, (Eph 5:25)

Irresistible Grace:

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. (Joh 6:37)

And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. (Joh 6:39)

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me-- (Joh 6:44-45)

And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." (Joh 6:65)

Perseverance:

And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." (Joh 6:39-40)

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. (Joh 10:27-29)

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:35-39)

Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. (Heb 7:25)

For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. (Heb 10:14)

looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb 12:2)

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (Php 2:12-13)

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, (Jud 1:24)

And as a nice summary of what God does for us:

- draws people to Himself (John 6:44,65).
- creates a clean heart (Psalm 51:10).
- appoints people to believe (Acts 13:48).
- works faith in the believer (John 6:28-29).
- chooses who is to be holy and blameless (Eph. 1:4).
- chooses us for salvation (2 Thess. 2:13-14).
- grants the act of believing (Phil. 1:29).
- grants repentance (2 Tim. 2:24-26).
- calls according to His purpose (2 Tim. 1:9).
- causes us to be born again (1 Pet. 1:3).
- predestines us to salvation (Rom. 8:29-30).
- predestines us to adoption (Eph. 1:5).
- predestines us according to His purpose (Eph. 1:11).
- makes us born again not by our will but by His will (John 1:12-13).