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**The Irrevocable Nature of Salvation as
Manifestation of God’s Attributes**

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Introduction

The presuppositional position of this paper is that Scripture is the Word of God and that Scripture is fully inspired in every word (2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:19-21; John 17:17). Moreover, the Holy Scriptures are infallible and inerrant in all that is affirmed in the logical, systematic, and rational revelation of God in the inspired writings. The doctrine of divine inspiration makes possible the other doctrines which are exegetically drawn from Scripture via the historical-grammatical method. The Protestant Reformation, however, has upheld the doctrine that Scripture is sufficient in and of itself in all matters of doctrine, faith and practice. Furthermore,

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Scripture is completely perspicuous, and where there are difficult passages the more plain passages of Scripture interpret those passages of Scripture which are harder to understand.

Although Scripture contains several genres of literature, including wisdom literature, gospel, poetry, historical narrative, epistolary and didactic materials, it is clear that revelation is given in propositional truth statements which establish doctrinal beliefs (2 Timothy 2:15; 3:15-17; Titus 2:1). The doctrine of *sola Scriptura* does not mean that the individual believer is free to interpret the Bible in any way they see fit (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 5:10). Affirming that Scripture alone is the final authority in all dogmatic doctrine, morality, and ethics implies the beginning axiom that Scripture is the word of God. From this axiom it is further presupposed that revelation is logical and that all theological truths are logically deduced from the Holy Scriptures.² Although individual Christians have a right to the principle of private interpretation, this does not mean that there are no secondary sources of authority. Scripture is the final authority and final arbiter in all doctrinal matters for individuals, congregations, and denominations (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:19-21). However, Scripture must be interpreted in order to be meaningful; therefore, congregations and denominations must have a secondary authority in the ecumenical creeds and Reformation confessions as a doctrinal foundation for fellowship, communion and authoritative teaching. These confessions and creeds draw their most certain warrant from Scripture and Scripture alone.³

² *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 1, Section 6: The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.¹ Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the word;² and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed.³ 1) 2 Tim. 3:15,16,17; Gal. 1:8,9; 2 Thess. 2:2. 2) John 6:45; 1 Cor. 2:9,10,11,12. 3) 1 Cor. 11:13,14; 1 Cor. 14:26,40.

³ The Anglican Formularies are the confessional position taken by the English Reformers. The Formularies are composed of the *Thirty-nine Articles of Religion*, the *1662 Book of Common Prayer*, the *Homilies*, and the *Ordinal*. Articles 6-8, 17-18, 20-22, 25, 28, 37 deal with the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* to one degree or another. [Article 8](#) proposes that the creeds and confessions are based on the principle of *sola Scriptura*. See: <http://www.eskimo.com/~lhowell/bcp1662/articles/articles.html>.

In addressing the question of whether or not eternal salvation is in its essence a manifestation of God's essential nature and attributes, one must consider the nature of knowledge itself. Implicit in such a question is the assumption that an individual can know and be assured that they have acquired such salvation (1 John 5:13). If the nature of salvation is that such salvation is impossible to lose and that such salvation is irrevocable, it follows that some basis for establishing the knowability and the assurance of this doctrine on the part of the believer must be established first. In short, truth is by its very nature propositional and systematic in nature. As the late Dr. Gordon H. Clark said, "Disjointed propositions can hardly be called true; truth can only exist in systematic form."⁴ For the Calvinist the secondary authority of the ecumenical creeds coupled together with the Reformed symbols or confessions is a non-negotiable proposition. Furthermore, given the nature of theology, philosophical and epistemological considerations cannot be avoided. The relationship between Scripture, confessional theology, and the assurance obtained by the believer is ultimately founded upon the axiom that Scripture alone is the ultimate divine revelation from God. Thus, believing and assenting to the gospel propositions in the objective revelation of Holy Scripture is the foundation for assurance of salvation and having a firm confidence in eternal security. This security is founded on the doctrine of justification by faith alone apart from works as that doctrine is understood within the systematic teaching of Scripture and outlined in the Reformed confessions. To confuse justification with sanctification is therefore an egregious error which undermines the assurance and security of the believer. To confuse justification with sanctification is tantamount to saying that salvation is by faith plus good works and merits.

Additionally, the Protestant, Anglican, Reformed and Evangelical commitments of this writer makes it obligatory that references be made to the *Anglican Formularies*, the *Westminster Standards*, and the Dutch *Three Forms of Unity* for a systematic understanding of this

⁴ Gordon H. Clark, *Thales to Dewey: A History of Philosophy: An Entertaining and Enlightening Survey of the World's Great Thought*, reprint 1980, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957), 443.

particular doctrine of eternal security.⁵ An inductive study of eternal salvation and perseverance must fit with the teaching of Scripture as the systematic and holistic source of propositional truth, although the doctrine of the final perseverance of God’s elect has been understood traditionally within a magisterial and reformational framework particularly as it developed in England and in continental Europe.

I. Epistemological and Apologetical Considerations in the Light of Theology and Christian Philosophy

Confessional theology within Protestant and Reformed Christianity has made a distinction between special revelation and natural or general revelation (Romans 1:18-32; 2 Peter 1:19-21).⁶ What this means for the classical Reformed and Calvinist position is that special revelation is necessary for the believer to have saving assent to the knowledge revealed in the propositional truth statements of Holy Scripture. Natural revelation or “natural light” is insufficient to produce saving faith, according to the apostle Paul (Romans 1:18-32). Only through faith in Jesus Christ and his gospel message is salvation possible (John 14:6; Acts 4:10, 12; John 1:12-13; 3:16-18; 5:24-25). The *Thirty-nine Articles of Religion*, the primary confessional statement of the Anglican Formularies, reiterates this biblical teaching.⁷ Thus, any idea of universal salvation or second chances in the grave are ruled out in regards to eternal salvation (Hebrews 9:27; Romans 9:11-18). The propositional statements made in Scripture make it clear that faith comes from hearing the gospel

⁵ These confessional documents are accessible online at: 1) [1662 Book of Common Prayer](#). 2) Westminster Standards: a) [Westminster Confession of Faith](#). b) [Larger Catechism](#). c) [Shorter Catechism](#). 3) [Three Forms of Unity](#).

⁶ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 1: Of the Holy Scripture: 1. Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men unexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of His will, which is necessary unto salvation: therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal Himself, and to declare that His will unto His Church; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God’s revealing His will unto His people being now ceased.

⁷ Article XVIII: Of obtaining eternal salvation only by the name of Christ. They also are to be had accursed that presume to say that every man shall be saved by the law or sect which he professeth, so that he be diligent to frame his life according to that law and the light of nature. For Holy Scripture doth set out to us only the name of Jesus Christ, whereby men must be saved. Accessed online at: <http://gavvie.tripod.com/39articles/art1.html#8>.

message and the Word of God (Romans 10:1-17). More will be said about this approach below.

Moreover, all knowledge begins with axioms which are in and of themselves presupposed and beyond the pale of empirical sensations or empirical evidences. Knowledge is a process of the intellect and therefore does not originate from veridicalism or empiricism, though the latter two concepts are indeed processed by the mind. Logical positivism, for example, has long been exposed as self-refuting since it contends that only what can be observed empirically can produce valid knowledge. This contention is itself not based on an empirical observation but is instead a presupposed axiom:

Early critics of logical positivism said that its fundamental tenets could not themselves be formulated consistently. The verifiability criterion of meaning did not seem verifiable; but neither was it simply a logical tautology, since it had implications for the practice of science and the empirical truth of other statements. This presented severe problems for the logical consistency of the theory.⁸

Ultimately then, the knowledge of God and the assurance of salvation must have an epistemological basis which is objective in nature. This objective standard for knowledge must begin with special revelation in the inspired and infallible Scriptures which contain propositional truth statements that are objectively revealed in written form. Proponents of this univocal and objective revelation in Holy Scripture include Gordon H. Clark, Carl F. H. Henry, and Robert L. Reymond. It is the contention of this paper that eternal salvation as assurance of God's irrevocable and irresistible call manifests itself through the gift of faith in the elect and their perseverance in faith to the end, although that perseverance is not necessarily consistent in obedience, sanctification, or performance.⁹ To contend that good works are necessary for salvation is to compromise with the Roman Catholic confusion of imputed justification with an infused sanctification or

⁸ "Logical Positivism: Criticisms," Wikipedia. Accessed online at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Logical_positivism#Criticisms.

⁹ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 17, "Of the Perseverance of the Saints," Section 3: Nevertheless, they may, through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins; and, for a time, continue therein: whereby they incur God's displeasure, and grieve His Holy Spirit, come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts; have their hearts hardened,⁶ and their consciences wounded; hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves.

righteousness. Justification is an objective and finished work of God through the active and passive obedience of Jesus Christ and is outside the believer, while sanctification is an infused righteousness which is subjective and infused into the heart or mind of the believer.

Moreover, to place knowledge solely in subjective experience is to open the door to skepticism and irrationalism. The philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard and Immanuel Kant prepared the way for a so-called middle way between Enlightenment scholasticism and the modernist and postmodernist view. According to Karl Barth, Emil Brunner and others in the neo-orthodox camp, rationalism and scholasticism leads ultimately to liberalism and skepticism. Unfortunately, their mediation between rationalism and irrationalism is itself based on an existentialist philosophy that leaves no objective revelation possible. For the neo-orthodox school of theology, revelation can only take place subjectively and existentially, since for them God is totally transcendent and ineffable due to His incomprehensibility. Although Barth and Brunner were in disagreement over the issue of natural revelation, both men rejected the doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration and the inerrancy of Scripture. For them Scripture could only be a framework for revelation but could not be itself a revelation from God. Unfortunately, many scholars in the Evangelical and Reformed tradition today have adopted a modified or mediating position between the Old School Princeton theology and neo-orthodoxy. This modern tendency is best exemplified in the theology of Cornelius Van Til and his followers.

According to the Van Tilian school, Scripture cannot be the univocal revelation of God due to the Creature/creator distinction. Instead, Scripture is an analogy of God's revelation but not direct revelation from God. Referring to the anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms in Scripture they reason that all Scripture is an analogy in the same way that Scripture contains metaphors, similes, parables, analogies, anthropomorphisms, and anthropopathisms in order to accommodate to the creature's ability to relate to God. For them the theology of Thomas Aquinas and his theory of analogy is alleged to be a mediating position between univocal revelation and the theory of revelation as equivocation advocated by neo-orthodox

theologians such as Karl Barth and Emil Brunner. R. Scott Clark, a proponent of Van Til's theology, contends:

Given the necessary chasm between God and the creature, as taught by Calvin and defended so ably and so long by Cornelius van Til, God must accommodate himself to his creatures. This accommodated revelation of God's mind and will is ectypal theology (*theologia ectypa*). It is based upon God's self-understanding, but not identical with it. Ectypal theology, as the adjective suggests, is a reflection of the archetypal theology. It is true, but it is accommodated to human creature.

It would appear that neither the Hyper-Calvinists nor the Open-Theists have understood or accounted for this distinction. All revelation is necessarily an accommodation. It is not as if, sometimes we have direct, unmediated access to God and at other times we do not.¹⁰

Unfortunately, the Van Tilian theory of accommodation goes too far. If all truth is God's truth wherever man's knowledge is an accurate understanding of God's revelation of that truth which coincides with God's intended propositional statements in Scripture, then the creature knows what God knows at that particular point of convergence. Although creatures certainly cannot know anything that God has not revealed in the plenary inspiration of Scripture, they can know what God has univocally revealed in the form of ectypal and accommodated revelation. Even in the arena of natural revelation humans can have at least some knowledge of the universe if natural revelation is interpreted primarily via the special revelation of Scripture.¹¹ However, the problem is that the neo-Kuyperian, neo-Calvinist, and Van Tilian school of thought has attempted to establish a mediating view between Evangelicalism and neo-orthodoxy and to make that position a test of confessional subscription. During the Clark/Van Til controversy in 1944, Van Til and his followers attempted to prevent the ordination of Gordon H. Clark based on their charges that he was a fundamentalist and a rationalist. None of the

¹⁰ R. Scott Clark, "Foreward to, *The Free Offer of the Gospel*," by John Murray. Accessed online at: <http://rscottclark.org/2012/09/the-free-offer-of-the-gospel/>.

¹¹ This is not to affirm any exaltation of natural revelation as equal to or superior to special revelation. The apostle Paul specifically denies that natural revelation in creation is sufficient for saving faith. Furthermore, exalting natural revelation above special revelation leads to skepticism since it leads to making Scripture subservient to the philosophy of science, evolutionary theories, and the gay/lesbian/transgender agenda.

charges were upheld by the Philadelphia Presbytery of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, however.¹²

The point of this discussion thus far is that the only basis for knowing and believing the doctrine of eternal salvation, eternal security, or the final perseverance of the saints is the axiom that Scripture is the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:19-21). Without this beginning point, reason and experience leads ultimately to skepticism and irrationalism. If Scripture is not univocally the very words of God on a creaturely level, then the individual Christian has no basis for believing in eternal security or any other doctrine. Personal experience is not a dependable source of truth since experience varies from one person to another and the commensurate level of sanctification and obedience is likewise variable.¹³

Knowledge is necessary for both justifying faith and for the process of sanctification, which is the imperfect result of that biblically given knowledge (John 17:17; Romans 3:20-25; 2 Peter 3:18). Basically, since God knows all truth, it logically follows that if humans know anything that is true then God and the believer know particular propositions or truth claims which are common to both, although it is most certainly true that God is the ultimate source of all truth. Contrary to the opinion of Dr. Michael Horton, this view does not reject the doctrine of God's incomprehensibility since believing that Scripture is univocally the inspired Word of God is not an attempt to pry into God's secret being:

Beneath the tumultuous conflicts of liberals are the various currents and countercurrents of modern epistemology. In spite of their great differences over the form that revelation takes, all of these models seem captive to a demand for revelation for revelational immediacy. R. S. Clark calls this the illegitimate demand for *religious certainty* and the illegitimate demand for *religious experience*.⁽⁴⁸⁾ We have already recognized this tendency in the first model,

¹² "The Answer: To a Complaint Against Several Actions and Decisions of the Presbytery of Philadelphia Taken in a Special Meeting Held on July 7, 1944." Accessed online at: <http://godshammer.files.wordpress.com/2010/07/the-answer.pdf>.

¹³ How can the Pentecostal refute the experience of the person who claims to be born homosexual or transgender when the only basis for Pentecostal theology is an experiential reading of the Scriptures? For the same reason eternal security does not depend on personal experience but on the propositional promises of God in the revelation of Holy Scripture.

with the explicit denial of the doctrine of analogy in favor of univocity by conservative theologians like Gordon Clark and Carl F. H. Henry.¹⁴

Moreover, Horton does not believe that the propositional truth claims made in the Scriptures are true for both God and man. Instead he believes that it is an illegitimate quest for religious certainty to say that Scripture is revealed to creatures univocally on their own level (Deuteronomy 29:29). Exactly how revelation in the written words of Scripture is “prying into the secret being of God” is not made clear, however.

In short, following Van Til’s theology, a person who believes they are eternally secure might be wrong because Scripture does not coincide at any single point between God’s knowledge and man’s knowledge even when that knowledge is revealed on the level of the creature. This presents a problem for the doctrine of eternal security unless there is an objective, propositional standard beyond mere personal experience to substantiate the personal assent to eternal security and the personal appropriation of eternal salvation. For the Evangelical and Reformed Christian that substantiating basis is Holy Scripture and the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. The secondary authority for personal belief and the corporate body of teaching must be a systematic exposition of the Scriptures which is consistent with biblical theology. That systematic exposition or “confession of faith” has authority within a congregation, denomination, or faith community so that a determination can be made between heresy and doctrinal orthodoxy. Without such a basis to decide the parameters of biblical orthodoxy, orthopraxy, and fellowship the believer and the local congregation is left in a quandary in regards to an objective standard for doctrine. For Anglo-Reformed and Presbyterian believers these sources of secondary authority are the Reformed symbols and the ecumenical creeds.¹⁵ Anglicans generally follow the

¹⁴ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims On the Way*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 126.

¹⁵ Although Calvinistic Baptists or Particular Baptists do have confessions of faith like the London Baptist Confession of Faith, most Baptists denigrate the use of creeds and confessions in favor of their doctrine of liberty of conscience. While it is true that liberty of conscience is an element of the magisterial Reformation in regards to the priesthood of believers, the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* never intended the more Anabaptist emphasis on solipsism and personal authority above Scripture. There is no private interpretation of Scripture (2 Peter 1:19-21).

*Anglican Formularies*¹⁶ while Presbyterians follow either the *Westminster Standards* or the Dutch *Three Forms of Unity*. For the Evangelical believer a rational justification for the Christian worldview and the doctrine of God's eternal election and salvation of believers is rooted firmly in the self-evident axiom that Scripture is the word of God (2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:19-21). From this presupposition all else is logically deduced.¹⁷ In other words, if Scripture is merely analogical and at no point does God's knowledge and creaturely knowledge converge, then the doctrine of eternal salvation as a manifestation of God's irrevocable decree to save his elect is in danger of being merely an ineffable, mystical and existential encounter rather than an objective promise given to those who intellectually assent to the propositions of the gospel as it is revealed in Holy Scripture.

II. *Sola Scriptura*: Biblical and Exegetical Considerations

As has been stated above, the approach of this paper in regards to the nature of eternal salvation is threefold: 1) The epistemological axiom that Scripture is the Word of God; 2) The Scriptures alone are the final authority and final arbiter of orthodox doctrine and orthodox practice; 3) Scripture needs a normative and systematic exposition as a basis for dogmatic doctrinal teaching, Christian fellowship, and congregational and denominational affiliation. In light of that necessity, a brief exposition of the biblical materials in regards to both eternal salvation and the nature and attributes of God will be undertaken. Salvation primarily depends on who God is as one God in three persons; an emphasis on eternal salvation is intimately connected with God's tri-personality and unity of essence as these doctrines are logically deduced from Scripture (2 Corinthians 13:14). The final perseverance of the elect is intimately and rationally connected with the tri-unity of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Moreover, eternal redemption and the resulting doctrine of eternal

¹⁶ The *Anglican Formularies* are the *Thirty-nine Articles of Religion*, the *1662 Book of Common Prayer*, and the *Ordinal*. The order of that authority is descending and the *Thirty-nine Articles* are primary, the *1662 BCP* is secondary, and the *Ordinal* is tertiary in authority. Of course, the *Thirty-nine Articles* specifically state that the *Scriptures* are the final authority in all matters of faith and practice.

¹⁷ See *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 1, "*Of the Scriptures*," Section 6. It should be noted that sections 4-5 affirm that Scripture is self-evidently revealed as God's Word and needs no human experience to confirm it or prove it as such.

security and the perseverance of the saints must fit into the *ordo salutis*, or logical and temporal order of salvation, and the covenantal teaching of Scripture as a complete system of doctrine.

Especially in regards to Martin Luther, the doctrine of justification by faith alone is the doctrine by which the church stands or falls.¹⁸ For Luther, however, the hinge upon which everything turns is the issue of the bondage of the will.¹⁹ Trusting in one's own ability to choose rightly by "free will" is an ultimately and undependable assurance, according to Luther. In fact, for the magisterial Reformers even conversion is not a "free will" choice, since the soul of man is completely unable to turn to Christ apart from an effectual call and regeneration preceding the choice to assent to the gospel message. Furthermore, unless the believer roots faith solidly in God's Word and God's promises there can be no assurance of salvation because the human will is hopelessly capricious, fickle, and prone to waffle back and forth between faith and self-justification:

Why does the apostle add, and the Lord Jesus Christ? Was it not enough to say from God our Father? A principle in the Scriptures that we must note carefully is this: we must abstain from wrongly seeking God's majesty. "No one may see me and live," says the Lord (Exodus 33:20). Those who trust in their own merits disregard this rule, and therefore they remove the mediator Christ out of their sight and speak only of God; to him alone they pray and do all that they do.

The monk thinks, "These works that I do please God. God will regard these vows of mine and will save me because of them." The Muslim says, "If I keep the things that are commanded in the Koran, God will accept me and give me everlasting life." The Jew thinks, "If I keep the things that the law commands, I shall find God merciful to me, and so I shall be saved." Similarly, some misguided people brag of the spirit of revelation, or of visions and other such monstrous matters, dealing in wonders above their reach. Such people have invented a new cross and new works and dream that by doing them they please God. To be brief, whoever does not know the truth of justification takes away Christ, the mercy-seat, and will have to comprehend God in his majesty by the judgment of reason and pacify him with their own works.

¹⁸ Justin Taylor, "Luther's Saying: 'Justification Is the Article by Which the Church Stands and Falls,'" "We don't have record of Luther using the exact phrase, but very close: *quia isto articulo stante stat Ecclesia, ruente ruit Ecclesia*—'Because if this article [of justification] stands, the church stands; if this article collapses, the church collapses.'" (WA 40/3.352.3).

Accessed online at: <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2011/08/31/luthers-saying/>.

¹⁹ Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*. Accessed online at:

www.truecovenanter.com/truelutheran/luther_bow.html.

But true Christian religion does not first present God in his majesty, as Moses and other teachers do. It commands us not to search out the nature of God, but to know his will presented to us in Christ, whom he wanted to take on flesh and be born and die for our sins; and he wants this to be preached among all nations. “For since in the wisdom of God the world in its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe” (1 Corinthians 1:21). So when your conscience is in conflict, wrestling against the law, sin, and death, in the presence of God, there is nothing more dangerous than to wander amidst curious heavenly speculations, searching out God’s incomprehensible power, wisdom, and majesty—how he created the world and how he governs it. If this is how you try to comprehend God, attempting to pacify him without Christ the mediator, making your works a means between him and yourself, you will fall as Lucifer did and in horrible despair will lose God and everything else. God is in his own nature immeasurable, incomprehensible, and infinite, and so human nature finds him intolerable.

If you want safety, then, to flee from perils of conscience and salvation, bridle your presumptuous spirit, and seek God in the way that Paul teaches: “We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:23–24). So begin where Christ began—namely, in the womb of the virgin, in the manger, at his mother’s breast. The reason he came down, was born, lived among men and women, suffered, was crucified, and died was so that he might present himself plainly to our eyes and fasten our spiritual sight upon himself, so that he might keep us from climbing into heaven and from the curious searching of the divine majesty.

Whenever you are dealing with the matter of justification, therefore, and are wondering where and how to find God who justifies and accepts sinners, remember that there is no other God besides this man, Christ Jesus. Embrace him, and hang on to him with your whole heart, setting aside all curious speculations about the divine majesty. Those vain people who exclude the Mediator do not believe this. Christ himself says, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).²⁰

Calvin likewise saw that the doctrine of justification by faith alone or *sola fide* is the hinge upon which the Christian faith depends and this in turn affects the doctrine of eternal security:

He thus holds, that none hope well in the Lord save those who confidently glory in being the heirs of the heavenly kingdom. No man, I say, is a believer but he who, trusting to the security of his salvation, confidently triumphs over the devil and death, as we are taught by the noble exclamation of Paul, “I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things

²⁰ Martin Luther, *Galatians*, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 34-35.

present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord,” (Rom. 8:38). In like manner, the same Apostle does not consider that the eyes of our understanding are enlightened unless we know what is the hope of the eternal inheritance to which we are called (Eph. 1:18). Thus he uniformly intimates throughout his writings, that the goodness of God is not properly comprehended when security does not follow as its fruit.

17. But it will be said that this differs widely from the experience of believers, who, in recognizing the grace of God toward them, not only feel disquietude (this often happens), but sometimes tremble, overcome with terror, so violent are the temptations which assail their minds. This scarcely seems consistent with certainty of faith. It is necessary to solve this difficulty, in order to maintain the doctrine above laid down. When we say that faith must be certain and secure, we certainly speak not of an assurance which is never affected by doubt, nor a security which anxiety never assails; we rather maintain that believers have a perpetual struggle with their own distrust, and are thus far from thinking that their consciences possess a placid quiet, uninterrupted by perturbation. On the other hand, whatever be the mode in which they are assailed, we deny that they fall off and abandon that sure confidence which they have formed in the mercy of God.²¹

Calvin, like Luther, did not ultimately place the security of the believer in the realm of a personal level of obedience or in the realm of feelings but in the realm of faith. When doubts arise the believer is to look to the cross and to God’s promises, not within the heart or mind (1 Corinthians 1:21; 2 Corinthians 1:20). What is particularly interesting here is that rightly understood Martin Luther was at least as strict as Calvin in regards to Luther’s view of absolute predestination and God’s sovereignty. It has been pointed out that in some ways Luther was more Calvinistic than Calvin.²² In particular, Luther did not reject reason or propositional truth in God’s revealed words in Scripture. Rather, he rejected reason apart from revelation. In the *Bondage of the Will* Luther affirms God’s absolute sovereignty in salvation and even affirms both election and reprobation of men and angels:

²¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1997), III:2:16-17.

²² Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 359. “. . . In his *Bondage of the Will*, Luther speaks of God’s activity in hardening the hearts of sinners ‘in far stronger terms than our divines’ (1:353.’” Footnote 24. Horton is quoting from Turretin here.

This, therefore, is also essentially necessary and wholesome for Christians to know: That God foreknows nothing by contingency, but that He foresees, purposes, and does all things according to His immutable, eternal, and infallible will. By this thunderbolt, “Free-will” is thrown prostrate, and utterly dashed to pieces. Those, therefore, who would assert “Free-will,” must either deny this thunderbolt, or pretend not to see it, or push it from them. . . .²³

I shall here draw this book to a conclusion: prepared if it were necessary to pursue this Discussion still farther. Though I consider that I have now abundantly satisfied the godly man, who wishes to believe the truth without making resistance. For if we believe it to be true, that God fore-knows and fore-ordains all things; that He can be neither deceived nor hindered in His Prescience and Predestination; and that nothing can take place but according to His Will, (which reason herself is compelled to confess;) then, even according to the testimony of reason herself, there can be no “Free-will”—in man,—in angel,—or in any creature!²⁴

For Luther salvation is certain because of God’s immutable will to save those who believe. There is no contingency with God since if God foreknows something it is certain to happen, as God is himself immutable in his own nature. If someone believes it is because God has effectually called that person, and salvation is absolutely certain because nothing happens by accident (John 6:44, 65; Hebrews 12:2). If God has effectually called someone to faith, that is a manifestation of God’s previous decree to unconditionally elect that person prior to the foundation of the world. There is no “free will” but only God’s irresistible grace and effectual call. Predestination is ultimately a comfort to believers precisely because they know that the reason they believed in the first place is that God decreed to elect and regenerate them from before the foundation of the world (John 3:3-8; Romans 8:28-32; Ephesians 1:4, 11). Luther clearly does not reject logic or reason in toto but only reason apart from God’s propositional truth statements in Scripture. It is Scripture that teaches predestination, election, and God’s immutable decrees to both election and reprobation, and Luther does not deny either doctrine (Isaiah 14:24; 46:9-10; Acts 2:23, 4:27-28).

Brian Mattson quotes Luther:

²³ Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, “*The Sovereignty of God*,” Section 9. Accessed online at: www.truecovenant.com/truelutheran/luther_bow.html#sover.

²⁴ Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, “*Conclusion*,” Section 167. Accessed online at: http://www.truecovenant.com/truelutheran/luther_bow.html#conc.

“All things whatever arise from, and depend on, the divine appointment; whereby it was foreordained who should receive the word of life, and who should disbelieve it; who should be delivered from their sins, and who should be hardened in them; and who should be justified and who should be condemned.”
– Martin Luther²⁵

Moreover, the *ordo salutis* begins rightly with the doctrine of unconditional election (Ephesians 1:4-5; Romans 9:11-13). Since God is immutable in His nature, it logically follows that election is unconditional, irreversible and irrevocable. Most notably, election does not depend on foreseen works either good or bad but on God’s personal and free decision. What is more, election is a decree of God made prior to the birth of the elect individual and prior to creation itself (Ephesians 1:4; Romans 8:29). Further, God is not capricious or arbitrary in his decrees since in his omnipotence God is able to do anything that is not logically contradictory to his nature as creator; God alone is free to do as he pleases (Psalm 115:3). Nothing God does is wrong or evil because he is in his nature and essence the only absolutely perfect being in every attribute comprehensible by the creature through the propositional revelation of the Scriptures (Isaiah 52:7; Romans 3:4-8). Further, the five points of Calvinism stand as a systematic unity in regards to a biblical exposition of the doctrine of eternal salvation and God’s immutable will as both tri-personal and unified as one divine being: Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Deuteronomy 4:35; 6:4; Matthew 3:16-17; 28:19; Luke 3:22; John 1:32).

The primary focus of any soteriology must finally be God Himself as He is revealed in the verbal plenary inspiration of Scripture. While modern Evangelicalism rightly emphasizes a personal relationship with God as triune, this personal relationship is not essentially existential, nor is it a mystical encounter. Instead, the personal relationship of the Christian with Jesus Christ is founded finally in belief or faith and an intellectual knowledge of and a rational assent to the doctrines of sovereign grace (Galatians 1:6-9; 2

²⁵ See, Brian G. Mattson, “Double or Nothing: Martin Luther’s Doctrine of Predestination.” Accessed online at: <http://209.157.64.200/focus/f-religion/700113/posts>. It is my contention that modern Lutherans have been influenced unduly by Phillip Melancthon’s more semi-pelagian leanings and by a capitulation to logical inconsistencies in order to sustain their departure from Luther’s more logically consistent system of theology as it is explicated in his commentary on Romans and in his other works.

Corinthians 11:3-4; Jude 1:3). Additionally, faith is defined as believing and assenting to the propositional truth claims about Jesus Christ, the moral law, and the gospel. All five of the *solas*²⁶ of the Protestant Reformation play a key role in the security of the believer, namely that salvation is completely a gift of sovereign grace as that doctrine is revealed in Scripture (Titus 3:5-7). The doctrine of *sola Scriptura* then is essential to the eternal security or the perseverance of the saints until the end of their lives; it is only in Scripture that anyone can obtain this knowledge and assent to the doctrinal propositions recorded therein (Luke 1:77; 11:52; Romans 10:2; 15:14; Acts 24:22; 1 Corinthians 1:5; 14:6; 15:34; 2 Corinthians 2:14; 4:6).

The biblical periscopes dealing with eternal security are many. However, in surveying these passages it should be noted that this paper presupposes the Protestant emphasis on a distinction between justification by faith alone and the doctrine of sanctification as both positional and progressive (Romans 4:1-8; Philippians 3:8-14). Sanctification can never be the basis for the security or assurance of the believer in any absolute sense due to the problem of God's moral perfection versus mankind's absolute corruption and sinfulness (Isaiah 64:6; Romans 3:23). God does not grade on a curve but expects sinless perfection from birth (Ezekiel 18:4; Matthew 5:17-20, 48; Romans 6:23). Since this perfect obedience required by God is impossible, due to the doctrine of total inability or total depravity, the only possible way of salvation is by faith alone. Christ Jesus has fulfilled all the requirements of God's moral law by living a sinless life for His elect (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 2:18, 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22). In fact, the eternal salvation of the believer is rooted and grounded in the substitutionary, particular atonement and the active and passive obedience of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:3; 1 Peter 2:24). The systematic nature of Christian doctrine makes isolating the eternal perseverance and salvation of the elect impossible, especially since it must fit within a deductive body of dogmatic teaching in Scripture. This systematic theology is summarized in brief in the Reformation confessions of the sixteenth century, although the

²⁶ The five *solas* or "onlies" of the Protestant Reformation are: 1) *sola Scriptura* or Scripture alone, 2) *sola gratia* or grace alone, 3) *sola fide* or faith alone, 4) *solus Christus* or Christ alone, 5) *solus Deo gloria* or all glory to God alone.

confessions are only binding as they draw their most certain warrant from Holy Scripture.²⁷

Due to the limitations of this paper only a few passages of Scripture will be examined. However, the attributes of God will be briefly considered in the light of eternal salvation and God's eternal nature. Scripture portrays God as a spiritual being who has no body parts or passions. One of the primary texts for this view is John 4:24: "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24 NKJV).

Whatever the divine image and likeness might be in humankind, it cannot be a physical body since God Himself has no corporeal existence in His eternal and divine being or essence. Not until the incarnation of Jesus Christ two millennia ago did God the Son, the divine Logos, assume a human body and nature. Additionally, the union of the divine nature with the human nature does not compromise either of the two natures since both are perfectly united in the hypostatic person of Christ, who is the second person of the triune God (2 Corinthians 13:14; Matthew 28:19). In him dwells all the divine nature in bodily form (Colossians 1:19; 2:9; 2 Timothy 3:16). However, this paper will focus on the doctrine of God's immutability. The three major attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence will be considered only as they relate to the manifestation of God's immutability in the doctrine of the irrevocability of saving faith—faith is impossible without God's monergistic gift enabling faith in the first place (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The key verses dealing with God's immutability in His essence are expressed in Malachi 3:6 and James 1:17. The key word in the original Hebrew is *שָׁנָה* (*šānâ*):

2419 *שָׁנָה* (*šānâ*) I, change. . . . The verb *šānâ* is sometimes used to describe a change in character or way or life. Thus the immutability of God is expressed in Mal 3:6 by the statement that God does not change, and his faithfulness to his

²⁷ I draw this inference from the same principle that is applied to the ecumenical creeds in Article VIII of the *Thirty-nine Articles of Religion*: Article VIII, Of the Three Creeds: The three Creeds, Nicene Creed, Athanasius' Creed, and that which is commonly called the Apostles' Creed, ought thoroughly to be received and believed; for they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture.

promise is shown in the statement that he will not alter that which he has spoken (Ps 89:34 [H 35]).²⁸

God as an eternal being could not possibly keep his covenantal promises to the people of Israel as an election nation if he were subject to human capriciousness and change. Thus, a key element of the doctrine of God's immutability is that he, in spite of the anthropopathisms in other passages, is not subject to fits of jealousy, capricious changes of mind, or other problems associated with creaturely limitations and the sinfulness of fallen humankind (Romans 5:12-21). The Septuagint translation of Malachi 3:6 uses the word ἀλλοιόω (alloioō) while the Greek New Testament uses the word παραλλαγή (parallagē) in James 1:17 where it is stated that there is no "variation" with God. However, the words seem to be used synonymously. Although the Septuagint is not an inspired translation, it can be useful to compare with the Hebrew Masoretic Text. The theological point made in both Malachi 3:6 and James 1:17 is that God is consistent and never breaks covenant with His elect people. His promises to Christian believers are trustworthy because God as a perfect being is always faithful to keep his covenant promises (Romans 9:4; Romans 15:8; 1 Corinthians 1:9; 10:13; 2 Corinthians 1:21; Galatians 3:16; 2 Timothy 2:13). Even when the elect people of Israel were unfaithful, God kept his covenant with Israel by preserving a remnant of elect individuals (Zechariah 14:2; Romans 9:11-13, 27; Romans 11:5).

Other key passages dealing with the unchangeable nature of God in his essence and attributes, including his existence as eternally self-existent in three persons, are throughout the Scriptures. A few of these are Hebrews 13:8, a reference to the incarnation of Jesus Christ. In particular, Psalm 102:26-27 reveals that the Hebrews understood that their trust and faith in Yahweh was based ultimately in his immutability:

They will perish, but You will endure; Yes, they will all grow old like a garment; Like a cloak You will change them, And they will be changed. 27 But You are the same, And Your years will have no end. (Psalm 102:26-27 NKJV)

²⁸ Hermann J. Austel, "2419 תִּשְׁבֵּר" In , in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr. and Bruce K. Waltke, electronic ed., (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 941.

Not only is God unchangeable, but he is eternally self-existent. God has no beginning or end in time and therefore he is transcendent above time which only begins at creation (Genesis 1-2). He is called the Alpha and the Omega (Revelation 1:8, 11; 21:6; 22:13). These theological affirmations of God's pre-eminence and immutability are key to understanding the irrevocability of his unconditional election prior to the foundation of the world. If then, salvation is ultimately rooted in God's decree to unconditional election, it logically follows that the entire *ordo salutis* is not based in free will, free choice, or even human accountability. Rather, eternal security is ultimately rooted in God's sovereign grace, particular election, and absolute predestination. Without this emphasis on God's absolute power to save and grant his grace and mercy to those who would have perished with the rest of the fallen mass of humankind there would be no salvation at all. In fact, if God gave his elect what they deserved they too would likewise perish with the rest of humankind (Luke 13:1-5). Salvation is eternal because God is eternally unchanging.

In short, unless God is without human capriciousness and passions, without variableness and change, and without temporal limitations there can be no sustainable doctrine of eternal salvation as an irrevocable manifestation of God's essential nature as eternally benevolent, particularly to his elect and his elect alone. Although it is true that God grants a general providential care for all humankind (Matthew 5:45), it is simply untrue that this implies either universal salvation or even a universal atonement (John 1:12-13). The general call to saving faith is a display of God's general providence and benevolence to all who hear the gospel (Matthew 22:1-13). Only the elect, however, receive an effectual call (Matthew 22:14; John 6: 37-40, 44, 65). Furthermore, not everyone in the world since creation has had the opportunity to hear the gospel message (Romans 10:7-17). In particular, Paul asks the rhetorical question, "And how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10:14). The expected response is that they cannot hear without a preacher. It logically follows that the apostle Paul is saying that those who have not heard the gospel message remain in their sins and all are without excuse, including both Jews and Gentiles (Romans 2:11-12; 3:9-20, 23). Those who attempt to come to God clothed in their own righteousness or without

a wedding garment will fall short and perish (Matthew 5:17-20, 48; 22:11-13; Romans 3:23; 6:23; 10:3).

A further consideration in a thorough examination of eternal salvation is that election and reprobation are necessary contrasts made in the text of Scripture (Romans 9:11-22; 1 Peter 2:8; Acts 2:23, 4:27-28). Double predestination is not a popular doctrine but it is biblical. Sometimes this biblical view is disparaged by way of the term “equal ultimacy,” meaning that God’s decrees are equal in both election and reprobation.²⁹ Some Calvinist scholars prefer to call reprobation “preterition” or a passing over of some sinful individuals and leaving them subject to their own sinful nature but this does not soften the doctrine of absolute predestination since, logically speaking, if God absolutely determines to save the elect unconditionally, it necessarily follows that reprobation is likewise God’s absolute decree to leave the wicked in bondage to their own sinful nature and subject to the corruption passed down from Adam (Romans 5:12-21). The doctrine of election is particularly important for the doctrine of eternal salvation, because inherent in the doctrine of salvation is the implication that not everyone will be saved and that some individuals will be lost. Furthermore, the Arminian and semi-Pelagian position overlooks that salvation in the Old Testament is particular and not general. Out of all the nations on earth at that time only the nation of Israel was subject to saving grace:

6 “For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. 7 The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; (Deuteronomy 7:6-7 NKJV)³⁰

In other words, the contrast between salvation and rebellion is an absolute distinction. Both Calvinists and Arminians agree that not everyone will be saved, but the Arminian view leaves salvation as simply a general call with a common grace given to all. Such grace guarantees nothing and leaves it theoretically possible that everyone

²⁹ God is the ultimate cause of the Egyptians’ refusal to obey God’s command to let His people go: “Israel also came into Egypt, And Jacob dwelt in the land of Ham. 24 He increased His people greatly, And made them stronger than their enemies. 25 He turned their heart to hate His people, To deal craftily with His servants.” (Psalm 105:23-25 NKJV).

³⁰ *The New King James Version*, Deuteronomy 7:6-7. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982.

in the future could potentially reject Christ and be lost, ultimately leaving believers in doubt as to whether or not they will actually persevere in faith to the end. The Calvinist view is that the number of the elect and of the reprobate is a set number that can no more be changed than God can be changed. Assurance of salvation for the Calvinist is a guarantee, a done deal. The basis for that assurance is God's promises, sovereignty, and absolute predestination. By implication then, everything that has happened, including creation, happened because of necessity, including the regeneration and faith of the believing elect. The great Puritan and Anglican minister, Stephen Charnock, brings the doctrine of God's immutability to greater clarity:

Unchangeableness doth necessarily pertain to the nature of God. It is of the same necessity with the rectitude of his nature; he can no more be changeable in his essence than he can be unrighteous in his actions. God is a necessary Being; he is necessarily what he is, and, therefore, is unchangeably what he is. Mutability belongs to contingency. If any perfection of his nature could be separated from him, he would cease to be God. What did not possess the whole nature of God, could not have the essence of God; it is reciprocated with the nature of God. Whatsoever is immutable by nature is God; whatsoever is God is immutable by nature. Some creatures are immutable by his grace and power. God is holy, happy, wise, good, by his essence; angels and men are made holy, wise, happy, strong, and good, by qualities and graces. The holiness, happiness, and wisdom of saints and angels, as they had a beginning, so they are capable of increase and diminution, and of an end also; for their standing is not from themselves, or from the nature of created strength, holiness, or wisdom, which in themselves are apt to fail, and finally to decay; but from the stability and confirmation they have by the gift and grace of God.³¹

God, being who he is, could do nothing outside of his eternal nature and it was his nature to create the universe just as it exists. Not one of those God has determined to save will ever be rejected or lost precisely because God is eternally faithful to himself, to his promises, and to his elect (John 10:26-29; 18:9). Again, the contrast between those who refuse to believe and those who do believe is not rooted in their own ability but in their inability to come to Christ without grace (John 6:37-40, 44, 65). Eternal security is not rooted in "free will" but in sovereign grace given to undeserving recipients. Without

³¹ Stephen Charnock, *The Existence Attributes of God*, Reprint 1853, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books: 1996), 318-319.

irresistible grace everyone would be unable to come to Christ and be saved. Thus, all would be lost and rightly so since God's justice demands eternal separation from God (Psalm 58:3; Psalm 130:3; Psalm 142:3; Matthew 10:28; 25:41; Romans 3:23; 6:23; I John 1:8-9; Revelation 20:10). Since God owes every individual person eternal judgment, the fact that he saves the elect is not unfair nor is it unjust but is rather an act of pure pardon and pure mercy. That God damns the reprobate and saves his elect is both just on the part of the reprobate's damnation and merciful on the part of the elect's salvation (Romans 4:1-8; 5:1-11).

The Old Testament makes this distinction between reprobation and election even more perspicuous. Moreover, the pagan nations of the Ancient Near East were not part of God's covenant of grace with Abraham (Genesis 15, 17; Deuteronomy 4:37). Thus, there is no "free offer of the Gospel" in the Old Testament. Instead, salvation is only promised to Abraham and his Hebrew descendants in regards to the contemporary period particular to the patriarch, although it cannot be denied that the covenant of grace predicts that through Abraham the gentiles too will have access to God via grace and the coming Messiah. In popular preaching it is often said that God has no grandchildren and that salvation is not by pedigree (Exodus 20:5-6; John 1:13-14). This much is true in regards to individual election. God chooses whom He will choose (Romans 9:13-18), yet His promises are given through families and through His covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17; Acts 2:38-39). This covenant is not merely a legal contract nor is it exactly the same as the suzerainty treaties of the Ancient Near East, although there are similarities with those cultures. The biblical theology of covenant is completely unique. The distinction here is that God is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. God's covenant is an eternal covenant because as a tri-personal God, he can swear by no one greater than Himself (Hebrews 6:13-18). He is a God who is not restricted to local geographical locations, nor is he to be associated with graven images. Moreover, idolatry is specifically forbidden in the Decalogue (Exodus 20:1-5). Because God is sovereign He will not share his glory with any human being nor will He share His glory with any created thing or any creature (Romans 1:22-23). To allow idolatry would contradict God's essential being; God is ontologically a being above which no other

being can be conceived. He can be identified with no material object because he is pure spirit (John 4:24). Eternal salvation is therefore rooted in the absolute sovereignty of God precisely because of God's absolutely unique status as creator (Isaiah 45:7; 46:9).

Just as in the Old Testament salvation is exclusive to the Hebrews through the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, so in the New Testament salvation is particularized through the Christian church and through individual election (Acts 2:38-41, 47; 20:28; Romans 9:11-18; Galatians 6:16). The very idea that the Gospel must be preached to the whole world implies that apart from faith in Jesus Christ the whole world is lost (Mark 16:16-18; Matthew 28:18-20; John 3:16-21, 36). Thus, universal salvation of all persons without exception is ruled out and those who have not heard the Gospel are justly condemned, even though they are not afforded an opportunity to repent and believe (John 14:6; Acts 16:6-7; Romans 1:18-32). There is no salvation apart from faith in Jesus Christ (John 3:3-8, 16-20, 36; 14:6; Acts 4:10, 12). In other words, the speculative theories of Donald Bloesch and other neo-orthodox "Evangelical" theologians in regards to a second chance in hell or conditional universal salvation after this life is refuted by Scripture. Nothing is to be added to Scripture or subtracted from Scripture, and it would appear that Bloesch has little to no biblical support for his speculations about a second chance in hell (Deuteronomy 4:2; Joshua 1:7; Proverbs 30:6 ; 1 Corinthians 4:6; Revelation 22:18-19). God would have been completely just in damning the whole human race. It is his mercy and pardon alone that determines salvation, not an obligation to save on his part:

And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work. (Romans 11:6 NKJV)

For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? 4 Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: "That You may be justified in Your words, And may overcome when You are judged." 5 But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.) 6 Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world? (Romans 3:3-6 NKJV)

Unfortunately, Donald Bloesch follows the theology of Karl Barth and his complete re-interpretation of Reformed theology. Bloesch has

no need for the doctrine of eternal security since in his opinion the cross obliterates any idea of an objective place of eternal torment and eternal punishment in the final judgment and the afterlife:

From my perspective hell as the outer darkness, eternal perdition, has been destroyed by the cross and resurrection victory of Christ, since he died for all and his gracious election goes out to all. The possibility of ontological separation from God has been cancelled by Jesus Christ through his universal atoning sacrifice. This kind of hell has been excluded from God's purposes. Yet an inner darkness remains as a sign and shadow of what has been overcome. To the rejected it appears to include the horror of eternal separation from God. The truth of the matter is that the pain in hell is due to the presence of God rather than his absence, to his unfathomable love rather than to any abysmal hatred, what is worse, gross indifference.³²

The doctrine of eternal security as an irrevocable state of salvation and a manifestation of God's mercy, grace, and unconditional election is necessarily opposed to any idea of universal atonement or universal salvation since its corollary is reprobation (Psalm 58:3; 1 Peter 2:8; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; John 6:70-71). If God owes salvation to everyone without exception, no matter how evil or offensive they are in the degree of wickedness and disobedience, then it follows that the doctrine of eternal security is unnecessary because all will be saved even if they remain ignorant of the gospel. Socinianism is the logical implication of the Arminian position.³³ Furthermore, the idea of eternal security opposes the concept of losing salvation after it has been given by God through the gift of faith. If universal salvation is true, then losing what all without exception already possess, by way of God's universal grace apart from faith, is

³² Donald G. Bloesch, *The Last Things: Resurrection, Judgment, Glory*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 217.

³³ Most Arminians cannot reconcile their view with the scriptural proposition that salvation is only through faith in Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:10, 12). They often contend that those who have not heard the gospel may have a second chance in hell or that they will be judged by the light they have (Luke 12:47-48). Even the evangelist Billy Graham was persuaded to accept the "wideness in God's mercy doctrine" espoused by Clark Pinnock and popularized on *The Hour of Power* television program at the Crystal Cathedral, where Robert Schuller's reinterpretation of sin as a loss of self esteem was broadcast weekly for decades. If rejecting implicit faith is "fundamentalism," then so be it. The doctrine of implicit faith or a wideness in God's mercy has more in common with Rome than with the Reformation. Article 18 of the *Thirty-nine Articles of Religion* clearly rejects the Arminian view:

"Article XVIII, Of obtaining eternal salvation only by the name of Christ, They also are to be had accused that presume to say that every man shall be saved by the law or sect which he professeth, so that he be diligent to frame his life according to that law and the light of nature. For Holy Scripture doth set out to us only the name of Jesus Christ, whereby men must be saved." Accessed online at: <http://gavvie.tripod.com/39articles/art2.html#18>. See also: www.ukapologetics.net/11/graham.htm.

illogical and self-contradictory, rendering any counter to the Arminian and Semi-Pelagian view both superfluous and moot. Scripture, on the other hand, proposes that God is not only essentially loving and benevolent in his being or nature; but, God is likewise the essence of justice, holiness, and goodness. A holy God and a good God would not be good or just if he in any way tolerated evil or wickedness (Isaiah 5:20; 6:1-7; Proverbs 17:15). Hence, the cross is an absolute necessity for the salvation of God's elect precisely because the cross is a demonstration of God's justice whereby he pours out his wrath against the elect upon his only begotten Son (Isaiah 53:4-5; John 3:16-18; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13; Ephesians 2:16; 1 Peter 2:22). The reprobate, on the other hand, has no vicar who bears the wrath of God in their place. Therefore, the reprobate must suffer God's wrath themselves (John 3:36; Revelation 14:10; 21:8). Reprobation, like election, is God's sovereign choice (Romans 9:13-22; 1 Peter 2:8).

Additionally, Bloesch overlooks the fact that Scripture itself teaches both reprobation and the eternal torment of those who refuse to admit that they cannot justify themselves before God because of the seriousness of their own sins (Romans 1:18-32; 9:11-22; 10:1-4). Scripture upholds the doctrine of hell as an objective place of eternal torment and punishment (Luke 12:5; 16:19-31). Particularly, hell is a demonstration of God's justice and even one sin is infinitely and eternally offensive to an omnibenevolent and omni-holy God (Matthew 5:48; 25:41; Romans 9:21-24; Ephesians 2:1-8). Furthermore, Bloesch's contention that the atonement is universal in God's decretive purposes and efficacious application is not supported by Scripture.³⁴ On the contrary, the atonement is applied particularly only to God's sheep:

“I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. 15
“As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. (John 10:14-15 NKJV)

Several key passages in the New Testament show the irrevocable nature of salvation of the believer as opposed to unbelievers and those who commit outright and willful apostasy (Deuteronomy 13:13; Hebrews 3:12; 1 John 2:19). While the only unforgivable sin in the

³⁴ Bloesch, 217.

Bible is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:31; 1 John 5:16), this would apply to both those who refuse to accept Jesus Christ and to those who ultimately reject the gospel after having come to faith (Matthew 13:3-9; John 3:18-20, 36). Those who reject Christ's active obedience to God's moral law and his sacrificial death on the cross—for all the sins of all the elect individuals predetermined to salvation prior to the foundation of the world and prior to their own natural birth—cannot be saved nor do they have any security or assurance of salvation (Romans 4:1-8; 10:1-4; 10:8-17).

From the Calvinist perspective, total inability as a result of Adam's rebellion against God renders men unable to believe (Genesis 6:5; Romans 5:12-21). Therefore, it is God's unconditional election before creation that is the ultimate cause of salvation (Ephesians 1:4-11). Regeneration or the new birth does not occur after a person gives faith to oneself. Faith is a result of regeneration, not the cause of regeneration. Regeneration and subsequent faith occur because of God's decree to unconditional election. The new birth as an analogy of natural birth means that believers do not give themselves the gift of faith; rather, God regenerates the elect prior to giving them faith (John 3:3-8). Faith itself is literally the "work of God" (John 6:29; Titus 3:5-7). Just as no one draws breath prior to natural birth, the elect cannot believe unless and until they are born from above by the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who regenerates according to his sovereign will (John 3:3-8). The Spirit, like the wind, comes and goes and bestows regeneration apart from human determination or observation (John 1:18; 3:8). Furthermore, no one can take away what God has bestowed unconditionally upon his elect (John 10:28-29; Romans 8:28-37).

III. Confessional Theology: A Brief Survey of the Reformed Standards of Unity

As seen from above, the doctrine of salvation as a manifestation of God's irrevocable and unconditional grace of election is rooted in the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty and in the doctrine of absolute predestination. However, it remains to be seen how these doctrines are explicated in the confessional theology of the Reformed formularies and symbols, particularly in the Anglican formularies. In this section an overview of the key concepts of the Reformed standards will be made as they relate to the doctrine of salvation as a

manifestation of God's essential nature and the necessity of God's irrevocable election to salvation. Perhaps the most pertinent and well known statement in regards to this eternal salvation is Lord's Day One in the Heidelberg Catechism:

Question 1. What is thy only comfort in life and death?

Answer: That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ; who, with His precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, and therefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto Him.³⁵

Basically, the doctrine of eternal security and the perseverance of the saints permeates the Reformed confessional statements and catechisms. Legitimately, it might be said that this doctrine is the essence of what it means to be Reformed. Unfortunately, however, many modern Reformed churches have drifted toward legalism and moralism on the far right and to mere moralism on the liberal and postmodernist left. If salvation is totally and absolutely grounded in God's sovereign grace then there is nothing that the elect believer contributes to his or her own salvation, including believing the gospel or progressing in sanctification (John 17:17; 2 Peter 3:18). A key indicator of the preaching of the true gospel is the accusation of antinomianism, although that is far from the truth.

Again, it should be pointed out that the doctrine of eternal salvation cannot be separated out from the overall systematic teaching of Scripture. While it is true that the big picture is important, the inductive details must fit with a biblical theology. This is precisely why Reformed theology has insisted not only on the primacy of Scripture but also on a systematic exegesis and exposition of Scripture. The *ordo salutis* or order of salvation and the confessional statements of the various national churches of the Protestant Reformation era were meant to give a magisterial and secondary authority to the churches. This view is in opposition to the Radical Reformation and the Anabaptist emphasis on subjective experience

³⁵ Accessed online at: <http://www.christurc.org/heidelberg.html>

and the Anabaptist tendency to downplay the objective, propositional truths revealed in Scripture.

Of primary importance to the security of the believer within this Reformed system of theology is the law/gospel³⁶ distinction. Often this doctrine of the Protestant Reformation is overlooked in regards to the doctrine of eternal security. However, Lutherans and Calvinists both agree that the law/gospel distinction is an essential doctrine for saving faith. Since God is omni-holy and perfectly good of his own essence and being, he cannot tolerate sin or wickedness in his creatures. The law of God requires absolutely perfect obedience and God will not and cannot loosen his demands for holiness in his creatures. (Matthew 5:17-20, 48). Unless the believer is justified by faith alone there is no hope for salvation at all, much less any doctrine of perseverance or eternal security. This is necessarily true because of the propositional statements in Scripture that God requires sinless perfection (Matthew 5:17-20, 48; Romans 10:1-4). Again, God does not grade on a curve; thus, every individual born subsequent to the rebellion of Adam falls short of the mark of absolute obedience (Romans 3:10-23; 6:23; Psalm 130:3; 143:2). Because believers are justified by faith alone apart from works, they can be assured that no matter how many struggles or moral failures are encountered in the Christian life salvation will not be taken away or revoked by God, nor can the believer fall out of God's hands (Jude 1:24-25).

Additionally, the law of God in Scripture is of three major kinds: 1) ceremonial/sacrificial law, 2) judicial/criminal law of the Old Testament nation of Israel, and 3) the moral law. The general consensus of Reformed theologians is that the atoning death of Christ Jesus on the cross fulfilled the sacrificial law (Hebrews 9:12-14). The *Thirty-nine Articles of Religion*, which is the Reformed confession of the English Reformation and a basis for the *Irish Articles* and the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, states in Article VII³⁷ that the

³⁶ The law/gospel distinction refers to the principle that whatever God commands or requires of believers in Scripture is moral law and whatever God promises to do apart from the obedience of believers or their abilities is gospel (2 Corinthians 1:20; Galatians 3:1-26).

³⁷ Article VII, Of the Old Testament, The Old Testament is not contrary to the New; for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and man, being both God and man. Wherefore they are not to be heard which feign that the old fathers did look only for transitory promises. Although the law given from God by Moses, as touching ceremonies and rites, do not bind Christian men, nor the civil precepts thereof ought of [Footnote continued on next page ...]

judicial law of the nation of Israel passed away with the Assyrian captivity of the northern kingdom in 722 B.C. and the Babylonian captivity of the southern kingdom in 586 B.C. The moral law, on the other hand, law is forever binding upon all humankind.³⁸

Understood within the traditional Reformed framework, the moral law has three applications or uses. The first of these is the primary use, namely the pedagogical use of the moral law. The second use of the moral law is to keep peace in society via the principle of general equity, whereby each nation uses the Decalogue as a model for general agreement with the apodictic law.³⁹ The third use of the moral law is in regards to the subjective and transformational process of growth in Christian maturity and is generally referred to as sanctification. Although the third use of the law is unrelated to justification, it is a guide for the life of faith to which the Christian aspires to live out of gratitude to God. However, as pointed out earlier, the process of sanctification is not a matter of making the believer worthy of salvation or of keeping the believer saved. Nor is sanctification a basis for God's judgment in the final day. If so, then no one will be saved because the good works of sinful believers can never withstand God's judgment (Psalm 130:3; 143:2; Isaiah 64:6; 1 John 1:8-9).

Interestingly, the Morning Prayer service in the *1662 Book of Common Prayer* utilizes "sentences" or verses of Scripture read at the beginning of the service. These sentences of Scripture are meant to point out the pedagogical use of the moral law as well as the obligation of the Christian believer to live by faith (Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38). Living by faith refers to the assent to justification by faith alone without forgetting that sanctification is an imperfect result of "living faith."⁴⁰ The genius of the father of the English Reformation, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer,

necessity to be received in any commonwealth; yet, notwithstanding, no Christian man whatsoever is free from the obedience of the commandments which are called moral. Accessed online at: <http://gavvie.tripod.com/39articles/art1.html#8>

³⁸ Article VII.

³⁹ The theology of theonomy attempts to conflate the judicial laws of the Old Testament theocratic nation of Israel with the moral law and make those laws binding on modern nations. Such a misapplication of the Reformed confessions is disappointing and borders on confusing justification by faith alone with the keeping of the moral law.

⁴⁰ Article XII.

was that he was able to incorporate into the English liturgies the doctrine of justification by faith alone and the law/gospel distinction. The assurance of salvation, therefore, is rooted firmly in the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Since no one keeps the moral law of God perfectly, everyone is under God's just condemnation (Romans 3:23; Psalm 130:3; Psalm 143:2). Everyone who is elect is born into sin and is an object of God's wrath until regeneration (Psalm 51:3-5; Psalm 58:3; John 3:36; Romans 5:7-10; Ephesians 2:3). The major purpose of the moral law is to reveal sin in both the reprobate and the elect (Romans 3:20; 7:7). This is especially revealing in regards to Cranmer's inclusion of the reading of the Decalogue in every administration of the Lord's Supper:

Minister. GOD spake these words, and said; I am the Lord thy God: Thou shalt have none other gods but me.

People. Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Minister. Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down to them, nor worship them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, and visit the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, and shew mercy unto thousands in them that love me, and keep my commandments.

People. Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Minister. Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless, that taketh his Name in vain.

People. Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Minister. Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath-day. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all that thou hast to do; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God. In it thou shalt do no manner of work, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, thy man-servant, and thy maid-servant, thy cattle, and the stranger that is within thy gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it.

People. Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Minister. Honour thy father and thy mother; that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

People. Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Minister. Thou shalt do no murder.

People. Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Minister. Thou shalt not commit adultery.

People. Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Minister. Thou shalt not steal.

People. Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Minister. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

People. Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Minister. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his servant, nor his maid, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is his.

People. Lord, have mercy upon us, and write all these thy laws in our hearts, we beseech thee.⁴¹

The contrast between the absolute requirements of God's moral law and the inability of the elect believer to keep God's moral law apart from his grace and mercy imparted to the believer is here accentuated in bold. If believers are unable to repent in and of themselves—even after conversion—then it is absolutely necessary for petitions to God that he might grant believers the grace to obey his commandments. Therefore, pride is shut out and no one can boast that they have obeyed God of themselves apart from a monergistic working of God's grace in the heart (Ephesians 2:8-9; Philippians 2:12-13). Therefore, despite the contention of many neo-Calvinists that sanctification is synergistic, Cranmer's theology in the *1662 Book of Common Prayer* would have it otherwise. This is not to say that moral agents are not accountable or responsible for their moral actions and thoughts. On the other hand, God alone deserves all the glory for any obedience the elect may manifest. Salvation is literally all of God, including the process of sanctification. This necessarily follows if there is no contingency with God.⁴² Although God does work through secondary causes and means, even these causes are ultimately sovereignly predetermined by God himself. The cross was no mere contingency in history but an absolute decree for the redemption of God's elect (Isaiah 14:24; 46:9-10; 53:1-11; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; 11:18). God never fails to bring about his decrees (Job 42:2; Psalm 115:3; 135:6; Daniel 4:35)

For good reason the *Prayer of Humble Access*, a part of the service for the Lord's Supper in the *1662 BCP*, is read prior to the taking of the sacrament of holy communion. That prayer, an allusion

⁴¹ *The 1662 Book of Common Prayer, "Holy Communion."* Accessed online at: <http://www.eskimo.com/~lhowell/bcp1662/communion/index.html>.

⁴² *Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 3: Of God's Eternal Decree:* "1. God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established."

to Luke 16:20-22 and Titus 3:5-7, emphasizes that believers bring absolutely nothing that makes them worthy to partake of the sacrament:

We do not presume to come to this thy Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy Table. But thou art the same Lord, whose property is always to have mercy: Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood, and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen.⁴³

Additionally, the *Thirty-nine Articles of Religion* are the primary confessional statement for the Anglican Reformed tradition and serve to interpret the *1662 Book of Common Prayer* rather than the other way around. The late David Broughton Knox, of the Sydney Anglicans, pointed this out in his brief exposition of the Articles of Religion:

The other formularies of the Church of England, for example, the Book of Common Prayer, ought to be interpreted in the light of the Articles and not the Articles in the light of the Prayer Book, because this latter course would be reversing the purposes for which the Articles were agreed upon. The Articles were designed to be the agreed upon doctrinal basis within which the Prayer Book is to be used and interpreted.⁴⁴

In other words, as a systematic exposition of the Anglican reading of the Scriptures and the ecumenical creeds, the *Thirty-nine Articles of Religion* stand as a composite whole.⁴⁵ It is within this context that the Anglican understanding of eternal salvation finds its proper place. Eternal salvation is rooted in the Augustinian and biblical theology of the English Reformation, which is mostly Calvinist but also linked with a solid Lutheran understanding of law and gospel. The doctrine of eternal security cannot therefore be properly understood outside of the Calvinist and Lutheran understanding of justification by faith

⁴³ *1662 BCP*, accessed online at: www.eskimo.com/~lhowell/bcp1662/communion/index.html.

⁴⁴ David Broughton Knox, *Thirty-nine Articles: The Historic Basis of Anglican Faith*, Chapter Six, "The Purpose and Character of the Articles," accessed online at: <http://reasonablechristian.blogspot.com/2009/08/part-xi-thirty-nine-articles-historic.html>.

⁴⁵ It should not be forgotten that the Forty-two Articles were directly written by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer and the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion were edited from the previous Forty-two Articles in 1571 by Archbishop Matthew Parker. See *Thirty-nine Articles*, Wikipedia. Accessed online at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thirty-Nine_Articles.

alone and the law/gospel distinction, nor can it be properly understood apart from the absolute sovereignty of God and the absolute decrees of God. Although living faith does include a change of heart and a duty to follow God’s moral law out of gratitude, ultimately the doctrine of eternal security and the perseverance of the saints depend on the law/gospel distinction and God’s unchanging and eternal nature. This is so precisely because Christians are prone to sin and to fall temporarily into grievous sins against God and neighbor (Psalm 130:3; Job 9:2; Nahum 1:6; Malachi 3:2). It is for this reason that a concise systematic exposition of the Scriptures is necessary, especially in regards to the tension between justification by faith alone and the resulting imperfect process of sanctification. The moral law can never justify anyone but serves only to demolish any last vestiges of self-righteousness, including the idea that believers by “free will” keeps themselves from falling (Romans 3:20; 7:7; Jude 1:24-25). Just as individual Christians do not “cooperate” in regeneration so they do not “cooperate” in the process of sanctification in any ultimate sense. Salvation as a whole, including any progress in knowledge or obedience, is all of God—even when the believer is faced with obligatory requirements of the moral law. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that believers are no longer under the law (Galatians 3:23-25). Believers cannot justify themselves under the covenant of works (Galatians 2:16; 3:11).

Ashley Null points out that even though Archbishop Thomas Cranmer suffered setbacks in his opposition to the Catholic leaning conservatives during the reign of Henry VIII, Cranmer persisted in refuting those views because he clearly saw that salvation was literally apart from good works:

Ever the scholar, however, Cranmer responded to this defeat by continuing to gather evidence to discredit the soteriology of the conservatives and to defend his own.⁷ Recording extracts from the Bible and Augustine, Cranmer used his great notebooks to delineate in more detail the arguments for solifidianism he had previously outlined to Henry in his ‘Annotations’. Firstly, works done before justification had neither saving grace nor saving faith to make them pleasing in God’s eyes. Secondly, in justification God pardoned sin by imputing Christ’s alien righteousness to the ungodly, not by infusing in them an inherent personal merit. Concomitant with this externally based justification was an intrinsic renovation of the will and its affections by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, the Spirit’s presence and the love he stirred in the believer’s heart did not constitute a personal righteousness meritorious *de condigno*. When

used in a broader sense to refer to both pardon and renewal, justification could be said to make the ungodly ‘right-willed’ but never inherently righteous. Lastly, justification could never be contingent on either human preparation or personal merit because salvation was ultimately by unconditional predestination of God’s elect.⁴⁶

The *Thirty-nine Articles of Religion* fleshes out the soteriology of Cranmer’s English Reformation most clearly in Articles 9-18.⁴⁷ Article 9 explicitly rejects Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism.⁴⁸ Given the similarities between Semi-Pelagianism and the later move by the Arminian Remonstrants toward the Roman and Semi-Pelagian view, it should be duly noted that the Wesleyan doctrine of prevenient grace in the 18th century is likewise refuted by Articles 9 and 10.⁴⁹ Of particular interest of this paper, however, is the emphasis on double predestination in Article 17:

Article XVII, Of Predestination and Election, Predestination to life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby, before the foundations of the world were laid, He hath constantly decreed by His counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom He hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation as vessels made to honour. Wherefore they which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God be called according to God’s purpose by His Spirit working in due season; they through grace obey the calling; they be justified freely; they be made sons of God by adoption; they be made like the image of His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ; they walk religiously in good works; and at length by God’s mercy they attain to everlasting felicity.

⁴⁶ Ashley Null, *Thomas Cranmer’s Doctrine of Repentance Renewing the Power to Love*, ebook, (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2006), 158-159.

Accessed online at: [http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/nlebk_192146_AN?sid=6e286ff7-712e-48a4-9498-
caa0a37d49ac@sessionmgr13&vid=8&lpid=lp_157](http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/nlebk_192146_AN?sid=6e286ff7-712e-48a4-9498-caa0a37d49ac@sessionmgr13&vid=8&lpid=lp_157).

⁴⁷ Articles 9-18. Accessed online at: <http://gavvie.tripod.com/39articles/art2.html>

⁴⁸ Article 9: “Article IX, Of Original or Birth Sin, Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the fault and corruption of the nature of every man that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit; and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God’s wrath and damnation. And this infection of nature doth remain, yea, in them that are regenerated, whereby the lust of the flesh, called in Greek phronema sarkos (which some do expound the wisdom, some sensuality, some the affection, some the desire of the flesh), is not subject to the law of God. And although there is no condemnation for them that believe and are baptized, yet the Apostle doth confess that concupiscence and lust hath itself the nature of sin.” Accessed online at: <http://gavvie.tripod.com/39articles/art2.html#9>.

⁴⁹ *Thirty-nine Articles*. Accessed online at: <http://gavvie.tripod.com/39articles/art2.html>.

As the godly consideration of Predestination and our Election in Christ is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons and such as feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh and their earthly members and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things, as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal salvation to be enjoyed through Christ, as because it doth fervently kindle their love towards God: so for curious and carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God's Predestination is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the devil doth thrust them either into desperation or into wretchedness of most unclean living no less perilous than desperation.

Furthermore, we must receive God's promises in such wise as they be generally set forth in Holy Scripture; and in our doings that will of God is to be followed which we have expressly declared unto us in the word of God.⁵⁰

Although there is an emphasis on good works here, that emphasis must be interpreted as a result of saving faith and not the cause of it. Nor can good works be the cause of perseverance (Philippians 2:12-13). Moreover, Cranmer's theology of sanctification specifically says that sanctification cannot withstand the judgment of God:

Albeit that good works, which are the fruits of faith and follow after justification, cannot put away our sins and endure the severity of God's judgment, yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively faith, insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit.⁵¹

Here it can be seen plainly why justification by faith alone is the foundation for the doctrine of eternal security in the Anglican Reformed view. Unconditional election and predestination as well as justification by faith alone points straight to God's unchanging nature and his eternal self-existence or aseity as the basis for eternal salvation. God saves of necessity because of who he is in his eternal nature and being. Salvation is eternal and irrevocable precisely because God is without human passions or body parts and because

⁵⁰ Accessed online at: <http://gavvie.tripod.com/39articles/art2.html#17>.

⁵¹ *Thirty-nine Articles, Article XII.* Accessed online at: <http://gavvie.tripod.com/39articles/art2.html#12>.

God is not capricious or swayed by emotions. He is eternally the same yesterday, today and forever. He never breaks covenant nor does he break his promise to save those who believe (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; 2 Timothy 2:13). The elect can know they are elect precisely because they have been given the gift of faith (John 3:3-8; 5:24-25; 1 Corinthians 12:7, 9; Ephesians 2:8-9). Just as a child knows that a good father will never leave nor forsake them, the Christian knows that no matter how terrible their sins may be God promises to forgive and receive them back into the fold (Luke 15:11-32).

Contrary to those who contend that Calvinists cannot know if they are elect, Cranmer's doctrine of predestination intimates that God's unconditional election prior to the foundation of the world is a source of great comfort to believers because God stirs within their hearts and minds a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and grants them the grace to believe:

As the godly consideration of Predestination and our Election in Christ is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons and such as feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh and their earthly members and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things, as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal salvation to be enjoyed through Christ, as because it doth fervently kindle their love towards God.⁵²

Unfortunately, some of the more radical Puritans went too far in the direction of self-examination to the point of obsession. For the magisterial Reformers, however, the sole basis for comfort was the knowledge that God accepts his elect solely on the basis of faith apart from good works. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Even though faith can be temporarily be shaken; God will not leave his elect in that condition but will provide a way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Conclusion

From this brief survey it can be clearly seen that the English Reformation followed closely the same parameters as the Protestant Reformation on the European continent, incorporating both Lutheran and Calvinist aspects of the law/gospel distinction into its doctrinal

⁵² Article 17.

formularies. Both the propositional nature of God’s plenary inspired revelation in Holy Scripture and the confessional system of theology drawn from the Scriptures sustain the elect believer in his or her understanding and knowledge of God and his manifestation of justice and benevolence in the objective work of the cross (John 3:16-18, 36; Romans 5:1-11). Salvation for the Anglican Reformed believer is literally a sovereign grace of God from beginning to end. Even sanctification is not something merely cooperated with but is literally a grace granted to the believer by God himself (Philippians 2:13). Therefore, sanctification can rightly be called “monergistic” even though the believer does respond with actual choices. This is why Cranmer worded his collects in the 1552 Book of Common Prayer the way he did:

The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany. The Collect. O GOD, who knowest us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright; Grant to us such strength and protection, as may support us in all dangers, and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.⁵³

Because salvation is rooted in God himself as eternally and forever unchanging, the believer can trust that God will keep his word, his promises and his covenant. Ironically, even Cranmer’s prayer for sanctifying grace implies the doctrine of eternal security. God alone can keep the capricious human will from falling. Viewed from the perspective of God’s eternal decrees, Salvation is a done deal and salvation is guaranteed. Even regeneration and faith proceed directly from God.

Further, the gospel message is essential as an instrument whereby God effectually calls his elect out of darkness and into his marvelous light (Romans 10:17; 1 Peter 2:9-10). Because believers are justified by faith alone they know that God may discipline for a time, but he will never leave nor forsake his elect (Hebrews 13:5). Grace and the doctrine of eternal salvation is not a license to sin, although even a brief perusal of the Old Testament account shows that the elect under the old covenant sinned grievously many times over. Samson and David are two examples of this, yet both are listed in the faith hall of

⁵³ 1662 BCP. Accessed online at:
www.eskimo.com/~lhowell/bcp1662/communion/xmas.html#Epiphany4.

fame in Hebrews 11. Given the frankness of the Scriptural record of the Old Testament saints, it is clear that they too were justified by faith alone and that salvation for them was as much a gift of God as it is today under the New Testament.⁵⁴ Sanctification is a concern for the Christian believer but never as a matter of losing salvation or keeping salvation. Sanctification is a matter of responding to God's infinite mercy and grace with an attitude of gratitude and thankfulness (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Timothy 1:15). Ultimately, no sin can separate the believer from God or his salvation (Exodus 13:14; Jeremiah 3:23; Romans 8:35-39).

Unfortunately, many contemporary Evangelicals have been unwittingly convinced by semi-Pelagianian views that lead to Rome. Many in the conservative Reformed camps have been convinced of what can only be called semi-Arminian views because of a downgrading of the doctrine of Scripture as the propositional and univocal word of God. The distinction between Arminianism and Calvinism is not merely an "apparent" paradox. Instead, this distinction is a genuine logical and rational contradiction. The middle ground is therefore excluded, as the Canons of Dort, 1618-19, so clearly show. The classical Reformed view can with strong confidence affirm the doctrine of eternal salvation and God's promises without any reservations or qualifications whatsoever.

Moreover, the Reformed view is similar to the doctrine of "once saved always saved," although it is not exactly the same doctrine held by the majority of Baptists. Baptists tend to lean in an Arminian direction on four of the five points of the Remonstrants and accept only the doctrine of perseverance, point five of Calvinism. For the Anglican Reformed and Presbyterians the doctrine of eternal salvation and eternal security is rooted firmly in the systematic exposition of Scripture and in their confessional statements, which are "proved by" the "most certain warrants of Holy Scripture."⁵⁵ These confessional statements exemplify the five points of Calvinism and the doctrines of

⁵⁴ "The Old Testament is not contrary to the New; for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and man, being both God and man. Wherefore they are not to be heard which feign that the old fathers did look only for transitory promises. . ." Article VII.

Accessed online at: <http://gavvie.tripod.com/39articles/art1.html#7>.

⁵⁵ Article VIII.

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sovereign grace. It is in this context that the irrevocable nature of salvation manifests God's eternal immutability in his being and will, especially in regards to his decree to save the elect and insure that they endure to the end by faith.



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