

Pastor's Papers | Ronald H. Gann
Theology/Doctrine

Unconditional Election: Faith & Repentance

Understanding Unconditional Election (Part 3)

(Extracted From *The Scandal Of Sovereignty*; Ronald H. Gann [Aventine Press, 2012])

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I know from firsthand experience what it means to be part of an inseparable duo. I am an identical twin. And having a lookalike who shares my DNA is one of the greatest thrills in my life. My twin brother is my closest confidant. He is a likeminded friend with whom I have everything in common and in whom I share the deepest passions. Even though we are separated by three thousand miles, there is hardly a time when we are not conjoined at the proverbial hip in some way, either psychologically or spiritually.

As with all identical twins, I enjoy a genetic synthesis with my brother that defies explanation. There have been times when I have seen things with what I know are his eyes, spoken words I knew were really his, and heard things through his ears. To the point, there are moments when I feel we are essentially the same person. From a passing glance, I tend to know my twin's thoughts before he speaks them—and he mine.

Much to the chagrin of wives everywhere, the relationship between twins usually exceeds the bounds of matrimony. And I suppose my brother and I are no different in this regard. On more than one occasion, for example, my wife has bemoaned the fact that I am more inclined to seek out my brother's opinion on a matter rather than her own. And this is no small issue between us. Having to play second-fiddle to a husband's sibling is a difficult assignment for any wife to tolerate. That it comes natural for me to gravitate toward him instead of her, regardless of the circumstance at hand, is but one of many crosses my wife bears in our marriage. Notwithstanding the occasional protest, she has come to accept the undeniable truth that my twin and I enjoy a level of intimacy that no other relationship—including the institution of marriage—can rival.

Having an identical brother who looks, behaves, thinks, laughs, talks, and walks like me, although certainly uncanny, is not without its social advantages. Growing up in the public school system (where popularity and image are coveted idols), I inherited some semblance of celebrity that I otherwise didn't deserve. Everyone knew who I was, so it seemed, or at the very least they knew *of* me by name. To them, I was either "Ronny or Donny" or "one of the twins" or they identified me as simply "one-half of the Gann brothers." There is a strange brew of fame mixed with confusion that comes with having a body-double.

At the same time, being part of an inseparable duo has its disadvantages. Raised in a middle-class home, it was not uncommon for my brother and me to share birthday and Christmas gifts when the family budget was tight. This was always a harsh pill for us to swallow. *What kid in his right mind ever wants to go halves with his sibling?* Moreover, I recall our freshmen year in high school when we both tried out for the

varsity baseball team. My skills were sorely lacking that year, which my countless fielding errors and strikeouts clearly showed, while my brother performed well-enough to earn a spot on the roster. Yet our coach, who evidently had no experience with coaching twins, was uncertain how to keep one twin around while letting go of the other. In the end, my brother paid the price for my poor exhibition of skills. We *both* were cut from the roster.

Discovering our individual value as young men—that is, our own identity—amid a community that refused to see us as anything other than joined at the hip proved challenging. Like a pair of familiar shoes, they would often say, what value is there in appreciating one without the matching other? In the minds of most everyone, my brother and I were, and in some respects still are, indivisible. Yet the reality is that we each have our own destiny in life, our own relationship with God, our own calling and gifting from the Spirit, our own personality quirks, our own families, and our own sins. We are individuals with similar but nevertheless distinct feelings, similar but unique likes and dislikes, and similar but separate hobbies and skills. We are two human beings, not one. I suppose our main complaint is that people tend to perceive us only as a package deal; a plight common to most sets of twins, perhaps even those in the Bible like Jacob and Esau (Gen. 25:24), Perez and Zerah (Gen. 38:27), and Thomas and his twin (John 11:16; 20:24; 21:2).¹ We are, and will always be, an inseparable duo.

It has been said that “two are better than one.” There is certainly some truth to this adage, especially as it relates to solving problems and making history. All of human culture, the West in particular, has benefited in some degree from the talented teamwork or pedigree of inseparable duos, going as far back as Adam and Eve in the Old Testament. At the beginning of history, Adam and Eve brought life to humankind and, according to Genesis 3:16-19, the pollutant of sin shortly thereafter. They are arguably the most eminent duo known to man. Adam and Eve represent the male and female genders respectively just as their sons Cain and Abel—a famous duo in their own right—prefigure those who are righteous and those who are disobedient.

Beyond biblical history, the entertainment industry has been a cradle for famous twosomes. Abbott and Costello, two burlesque comics in the 1930s, joined together to make balderdash humor a serious art form. They continue to be worldwide sensations a half-century after their deaths. Another iconic duo from the classical era of American comedy is Laurel and Hardy. They entertained audiences for decades with their slapstick tomfoolery which spanned some 100 feature-length films and movie shorts. Both of these comedy teams paved the way for the vaudevillian stage acts of Martin and Lewis in the 1950s, the Smothers Brothers in the 1960s, and the comedic magicians Penn and Teller in the 1990s—famous duos each and every one of them. It’s worth noting, however, that when pursuing their solo careers, hardly any of these comedians were able to replicate the success they enjoyed as a couple.

The comedy circuit does not stand alone in producing celebrated duets. Many chart-topping songs and high-quality stage productions are the result of creative collaborations among brilliant composers, skillful musicians, vocalists, and lyricists. Over the past century classical music has produced the award-winning duos of Gilbert and Sullivan, Rodgers and Hammerstein, and George and Ira Gershwin. Likewise, pop-music boasts impressive double-acts such as Simon and Garfunkel, The Everly Brothers, and Sonny and Cher, not to mention The Righteous Brothers, Jan and Dean, and Hall

and Oates. Each of these acts experienced exceptional success performing as pairs, yet virtually all of them stumbled embarrassingly when venturing out on their own. Without their counterpart in tow, many of them found success as a soloist fleeting.

In the world of fiction, the creative writing of William Shakespeare and the animation of Walt Disney also introduced famous pairings. Owing to their commitment to each other, Romeo and Juliet are the quintessential Shakespearian couple who embody undying love. They are arguably the most tragic duo in all of romantic literature. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Disney's Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck have entertained children for decades with their cartoonish shenanigans. They are the face of Disneyland and Disneyworld today. But none of these characters are as gripping without their significant other beside them. The story of Romeo loses its appeal without his Juliet. And with no protagonist like Donald Duck to goad him, Mickey Mouse is just another animated rodent.

Whether it's Bonnie and Clyde, Batman and Robin, Barbie and Ken, Astaire and Rogers, or simply the wonder of identical twins, inseparable duos tickle our collective imagination. It takes a unique melding of personalities, talents, and skills to develop into a team that captures the attention of an entire generation, to say nothing about the generations that follow. Every walk of life, every field of interest, and every culture has certain pairs that rise to the top of their field. A select few, such as those already described, outshine all others by their chemistry.

The theology of Christianity knows something about dynamic duos. The doctrine of justification, for example, goes hand-in-hand with the doctrine of salvation. A sinner cannot be declared righteous before a holy God on account of his faith in Christ (justification) without also being eternally delivered from God's wrath (salvation). Conversely, the Bible knows nothing about a saved sinner who, at the same time, is not also legally righteous before God. To suggest otherwise is to entertain a theological fiction. Where there is a saved sinner there stands also a justified one. And where there stands a sinner who has been justified, there also stands a saved sinner. Although they are distinct components in the act of redemption, the doctrines of justification and salvation are an inseparable duo.

This same truth can be said about the relationship between God's grace and mercy. As it relates to salvation, the definition of God's mercy is best understood in simplistic terms. We may define mercy as "a sinner *not getting* what he in fact *does* deserve." The idea in view here is that God's mercy saves a guilty sinner from where he ought to go in death—hell. But only the opposite is true for the definition of God's grace. We define grace as "a sinner *getting* what he in fact *does not* deserve." The idea here is that God's grace awards a guilty sinner with what he ought not to have in death—heaven. Thus, while God's mercy and grace are independent of each other and have unique roles by decree, they are ultimately conjoined at the hip. In point of fact, whenever God saves a sinner from hell (by mercy), that same sinner is automatically and simultaneously given heaven instead (by grace). God's mercy and grace are an inseparable duo.

Each of these amazing duos—justification and salvation as well as mercy and grace—play pivotal roles in Christian theology. And each is inherently the work of God alone. However, within the scope of redemption, Calvinism sees another set of twins—albeit somewhat fraternal—crucial to the doctrine of Unconditional Election. And these

twins are called faith and repentance. They are joined at the hip. Saving faith always leads to repentance. And authentic repentance always leads to emboldened faith. Where there is a repentant sinner there stands also a faithful one. And where there stands a sinner with faith, there also stands a penitent one. As Charles Spurgeon so eloquently put it:

Repentance is the inseparable companion of faith; ... [they] are vitally joined together ... [and] are but two spokes in the same wheel, two handles of the same plow ... Repentance and faith are like Siamese twins. If one is sick the other cannot be well, for they live but one life. If ever you are asked which comes first, repentance or faith, you may answer by another question: Which spoke moves first when the wheel begins to move?²

These twins are not without controversy in Reformed Theology, for to suggest as Calvinists do that repentance and faith are divine *gifts* exclusively granted to the Elect, as opposed to human *rights* universally procured at will, makes many Arminians apoplectic. It removes man's autonomy in the act of salvation and places it in the court of God's sovereign benevolence. That is to say, just as justification and salvation are divine prerogatives, together with mercy and grace, so are the twins of faith and repentance. And it is to this fraternal relationship we now turn.

Gifts Or Entitlements?

Without question, there is a healthy tension that exists in Scripture between the responsibility of men and the sovereignty of God in salvation. Calvinists openly acknowledge this fact, as do Arminians. And to suggest otherwise is simply disingenuous. Like the inscrutability of the Trinity, the paradox of a double-natured Christ, or the mysterious relationship between faith and works, apparent conundrums abound in Scripture. But when Calvinists admit that a sinner does in fact possess a moral will they are not conceding that he is free to exercise it in the pursuit of godliness. In other words, it is one thing to say that a fallen person can willfully choose which cereal to eat for breakfast, says the Calvinist, it is altogether a different thing to teach that unregenerate, sinful, and enslaved God-haters can freely choose to follow the path of holiness. With his tongue planted firmly in his cheek, even the notorious and formidable atheist Christopher Hitchens (1949-2011) saw the paradox of so-called free-will, albeit from a different set of eyes. He said the following:

Yes, I think we have free will. And when asked why I think so, I would have to take refuge in philosophical irony and say, "because I don't think we have any choice but to have free will." But at least I know at this point that I'm being ironic and that some of the irony is at my own expense, and it's a risk I have to be willing to run. But the Christian answer is, "Of course you have free will; the Boss insists upon it!" This somewhat degrades the freedom and redefines the idea of [free] will.³

To Hitchens, the concept of free-will is ironical, even though he had no choice but to admit to its certainty. And to some extent Calvinists would agree. We do not deny that man has a will, as is so often mischaracterized by our opponents, inasmuch as we deny its effectiveness in the act of salvation. Owing to man's total reprobation, the Calvinist insists that the will of man is rendered ineffective in terms of seeking after or yearning for salvation. "Not free-will but self-will," concluded Dr. Loraine Boettner, "would more appropriately describe man's condition since the fall."⁴

Reformed Theology not only acknowledges the reality of self-will but recognizes that the Scriptures speak volumes about how man exercises it. In fact, what many evangelicals prize as inviolate—that is, man's volitional freedom—the Bible laments. How man exercises his moral freedom in his natural depravity is a matter of biblical and historical record.

Human autonomy, for example, is directly responsible for the fall of the Adamic race into sin and trespass (Rom. 5:12); the first homicide (Gen. 4:2-25); the universal wickedness that led to the Great Flood (Gen. 7); the rebellion of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9); the sexual debauchery and inhospitality of Sodom and Gomorrah (Ezek. 16:49; Jude 1:7); the golden calf of idolatry (Exod. 32); Israel's forty-year wilderness wanderings (Num. 14:33-34) and recurring backsliding (Judges 2:17-19); the illicit behavior of Samson and Delilah (Judges 16:1-22); the sin of David and Bathsheba, and the murder of Uriah (2 Sam. 11); familial intrigue, incest, rape, and bestiality (Lev. 18 cf. 2 Sam. 13:1-22); governmental corruption, oppression, and priestly sacrilege (Jer. 32:31-33; 44:8-10); the overthrow of Israel by Assyria (2 Kings 17:1-21); the fall of wayward Judah to Babylon (2 Kings 24:12-16); the assassination of godly prophets and apostles (Luke 13:34); and most disturbingly, the crucifixion of God incarnate (Matt. 27:33-44; Mark 15:22-32; Luke 23:33-43; John 19:17-30).

Sadly, the truth of Scripture reveals that the more fallen man exercises his reprobate will the more it leads him away from God, *not toward Him*. Is it any wonder, then, that God chose to sovereignly act beforehand by proactively choosing, predestinating, and electing for Himself a special people too depraved to choose Him? That God chose to do so, rather than relegating our salvation to the court of human autonomy, is the beauty of Unconditional Election.

Once again, Calvinists do not deny the existence of self-will. We affirm that people are free to choose whatever they so desire. But when given the freedom to choose good or evil, unregenerate man will instinctively choose evil because "every inclination of the thoughts of his heart [are] only evil all the time" (Gen. 6:5). As Jonathan Edwards reasoned, free and fallen sinners will choose evil, and only evil, because that is what the unregenerate heart desires most. Commenting further in an audio lecture, Dr. R.C. Sproul summarized the Reformed position this way:

I don't know any Augustinian [Calvinist] who does not strongly affirm that we have free-will. We are volitional creatures. God has given us minds and hearts, and He has given us 'will.' And we exercise that will all the time. We make choices every minute of the day. And we choose what we want. And we choose freely ...

We choose only according to our desires, which are only wicked all the time, the Bible tells us. And we are, as it were, dead in sin and trespasses ... and we're walking according to the course of this world and according to the prince of the power of the earth, fulfilling the lusts of the flesh ... And so the Bible makes it clear that we are actively involved making choices, for which we are ultimately responsible and which exposes us to the judgment of God. [So while man is free] at the same time the Bible teaches us that we are enslaved. We're free from coercion, but we ... are not free from ourselves. We are not free from our own sinful inclinations, and our sinful appetites, and our sinful desires. We are slaves to our sinful impulses.⁵

Man's enslaved-freedom—an oxymoronic term if ever there was one—is self-evident. The Scriptures make clear that the fruit borne from man's so-called autonomous agency is “fruit for death” (Rom. 7:5) but not “fruit of righteousness” (Php. 1:11). Man's self-will *does not* and *cannot* produce a craving for godliness, a yearning for holiness, or a hunger and thirst for righteousness. Instead, it yields only “sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like” (Gal. 5:19). These are the stocks and bonds in which sinful men invest and the only crop they produce from it.

In terms of man's moral independence, the Old Testament prophets were remarkably forthright. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots?” asked a rhetorical Jeremiah. “Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil” (Jer. 13:23). Far from championing man's moral liberty, Jeremiah captures with one swipe of the quill the slavery inherent to all men. Furthermore, whatever “righteous acts” man may think he is capable of doing from within the confines of his enslaved-freedom, they are put in proper perspective by Isaiah who equated them with “filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6). In the end, we learn that man's free-agency, when carried out to its full potential, is limited only to his freedom to sin.

But if this is true, how do we then explain the myriad of Bible verses that suggest man can choose to do otherwise? How do we reconcile Calvinism's low view of man's abilities and inclinations with God's high expectations for sinners? The Calvinist's response is straightforward. While it is true that all men are commanded in Scripture to exercise their self-will and “choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve” (Josh. 24:15); and “choose to fear the Lord” (Prov. 1:29), “choose the right” (Isa. 7:15-16), and choose “to do God's will” (John 7:17), the Scriptures also make clear that man cannot oblige these commands on his own for he does not possess the wherewithal. Moreover, whereas all people are encouraged to “Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always” (1 Chron. 16:11) and to “seek [God] with all your heart” (Jer. 29:13), the Bible also reminds us that, when left to his own resources, no sinner actually does (Rom. 3:11 cf. Ps. 14:1-3; 53:1-3; Eccl. 7:20).

Mankind *cannot* and *will not* pursue the things of God or seek His face any more than he can attain moral perfection and practical holiness in the flesh, although Christ commands the sinner just the same (Lev. 10:3 cf. Matt. 5:48; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). To suggest that fallen man has the natural ability to comply with righteousness solely on the

grounds that God commands it is to fall into the trap set by Pelagius, who famously said, “If I ought, then I can.” Because the Bible does not bear his statement out, this brand of theological humanism was deposed resoundingly by the Patristic Fathers. They understood that the command to obey does not prove man’s ability to comply. In other words, just because God commands His creatures to love and emulate Him, to seek after Him with absolute abandonment, and to choose the path of godliness over wickedness does not logically follow that sinners, by default, have the innate capacity to do so. (We have already seen in Section 2 the degree to which unregenerate man is spiritually impotent and unable to obey the salvific imperatives of Scripture).

So if the unregenerate are in bondage to sin and lack the liberty to choose Christ for salvation, then how exactly do elect sinners ever come to saving faith and repent? The answer is as humbling as it is wonderful. God graciously grants to those whom He has chosen, through the miracle of spiritual regeneration, the ability to appropriate that which is alien to them (faith and repentance) in order that they might become “as aliens and strangers in the world” (1 Pet. 2:11 cf. Heb. 11:13b). Stated differently, God grants *as gifts* to His beloved people both the required faith and the necessary repentance for salvation whereby they are “no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household” (Eph. 2:19 cf. Php. 3:20). These gifts are not afforded to all the sons of Adam uniformly but are reserved only for the sons of the “last Adam”—Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:45)—who have been elected for salvation unconditionally.

That faith and repentance are said to be gifts from God undercuts Arminian theology at its core. It removes man’s so-called moral freedom to do either in exchange for God’s sovereign freedom to grant both according to His will. And try as it might, to suggest that God denies these gifts to some while granting them to others does not wash well in an anthropocentric (man-centered) theology like Arminianism. Thus, for Pelagians, semi-Pelagians, and Arminians, the only alternative is to object as loudly as possible to any teaching that dares to rob boastful man of his own ability to repent and believe. Dave Hunt sounds the Arminian alarm accordingly:

... never do we read of saving faith as God’s gift to a sinner. The Bible speaks continually of faith as something for which the individual is responsible. ... There is not one verse that says faith comes by regeneration ... Clearly there is [free-will] responsibility on the part of the person exercising faith.⁶

Like Hunt, those who subscribe to free-will theology counter the Reformed view with a library of assumptions which seek to make faith and repentance universal entitlements open to all rather than exclusive gifts allocated only to some. While God graciously equips *every* sinner *everywhere* with the ability to repent and believe, they say, He does not interfere with man’s freedom to do either. Faith and repentance are part and parcel of man’s free-will responsibility, they continue, which precedes the new birth (but does not result from it). A sinner’s faith is his gift to God rather than God’s gift to the sinner; it is man’s contribution to the salvation formula. Most Arminians conclude, therefore, that faith and repentance are universal rights available to all men simply for the choosing.

Arminianism is correct when it states that the gospel calls everyone to repentance and exhorts all men to believe. And Calvinists agree that it is man's duty and privilege to do just that. Yet what Arminians refuse to accept, lest their entire theological system crumble, is that all men, being sinners by nature, would rather wallow in their sin and spurn the gracious promises of God than repent and be reconciled to Him. "Of them the proverbs are true," Peter declared. "A dog returns to its vomit,' and, 'A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud'" (2 Pet. 2:22). In other words, the unregenerate prefer their sinful filth to the cleansing waters of spiritual purification. And why is this so? "This is the verdict," Jesus declared, "Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil" (John 3:18).

While all men are certainly entreated, beseeched, commanded, and pleaded with in Scripture to turn to God in faith and repentance, the sad reality is that they simply *will not* nor *cannot* because of their infatuation with darkness. A sinner's only possible escape from the shadows of sin is the hope that God will sovereignly grant him faith and repentance whereby he is given new eyes to behold the "light of the world" (John 8:12; 9:5).

While Dave Hunt's personal theology and tradition retards his lucidity on this point, the Bible is emphatically lucid: Faith and repentance are gifts from the Holy Spirit who works in the hearts of those unconditionally elected. This is evident in the words of Paul to the Corinthians: "What do you have that God hasn't given you? And if everything you have is from God, why boast as though it were not a gift? (1 Cor. 4:7, NLT). To paraphrase Paul, all that a sinner exercises in terms of coming to Christ—whether it is his freedom of the will, the ability to repent, or the faith to believe—comes ultimately "from God." Moreover, Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him," and again, "no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him" (John 6:44, 65). Another way of stating this truth is to say that no one can repent and believe in Christ unless the Father enables him to do so. This is in keeping with the Bible's teaching that the ability to believe in Christ and the willingness to turn away from sin—far from being universal entitlements doled out to all men—are special gifts uniquely given to those whom the Father draws to the Son and those whom the Son chooses to reveal the Father (Matt. 11:27; Luke 10:22).

Concerning the act of repentance (i.e. to undergo "a change of mind [about sin]"),⁷ the apostle Paul said that the Lord's servant should gently instruct unbelievers "in the hope that *God will grant them repentance* leading them to a knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 2:25, emphasis added). Here repentance is clearly seen as a gift that is *granted* by God. Similarly, the apostle Peter declared that God exalted Jesus to his own right hand as Prince and Savior "that he might *give repentance and forgiveness* of sins to Israel" (Acts 5:31, emphasis added). In this passage we see that repentance is *given* by God as a gift. On another occasion, when the Jewish believers heard about the conversion of the Gentiles, they "praised God, saying, 'So then, *God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life*'" (Acts 11:18, emphasis added). Here again, we see repentance in the form of a divine grant. Thus, the picture that is painted by the inspired artists of Scripture depicts an elect people, comprised of both Jewish and Gentile believers, who inevitably turn to the Lord in repentance because God mercifully *grants* that they should.

Repentance of sin, however, is not a stand-alone gift from God. It is always accompanied by the gift of saving faith. They are an inseparable duo. As with penitence, the ability to believe in Christ is not doled out indiscriminately to all people, much less in equal allotments. Instead, some individuals are given great measures of faith (cf. Rom. 12:3; 1 Cor. 13:2) whereas others apparently weaker faith (cf. Rom. 14:1), and still others none at all (cf. Heb. 3:18-20).

The apostle Paul reminded the Ephesians—and all Christians by extension—that they had been saved “by grace through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8-9). We learn from this statement that the faith we exercise as believers is not of ourselves. Rather, “it is the gift of God.” That the apostle saw saving faith as a gift, alongside salvation, is evident by his later comment that “faith comes from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 6:23, CEB). Paul clearly saw that saving faith does not originate in the heart of man but comes as a love gift from the heart of God. As he expressed to the Galatians: “But the fruit of the Spirit is ... faithfulness” (Gal. 5:22), which can also be translated “faith.”

Continuing, the apostle Peter wrote that those chosen in Christ “have received a faith as precious as ours” (2 Pet. 1:1). What is of paramount importance here is the significance of the Greek verb *lagchano* that is translated “have received” (NASB) or “have obtained” (ESV). This verb carries with it the idea of an endowment. It specifically means “to obtain by lot” or “to receive by divine allotment”⁸ (see Luke 1:9; John 19:24; Acts 1:17). A person cannot receive something without it first being given. In this case, the faith to which Peter refers is removed from the realm of human free-will and placed in its proper perspective as having originated in the sovereign and altogether gracious will of God. The apostle maintains that it was not by random chance or luck of the draw that some came to saving faith. Rather, a “faith as precious as ours” was *allotted* to believers by virtue of “the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”

Elsewhere, the Elect of God are described as those “who by grace have believed” (Acts 18:27) and have been “granted” saving faith (Php. 1:29). Moreover, each believer has been spiritually gifted “in accordance with the measure of faith God has given [them]” (Rom. 12:3). We learn from these passages that, just as with repentance, saving faith is “granted,” “given,” and “measured” out to the people of God “by grace.” These are not statements applied liberally to all men; they refer only to believers, as their contexts explain. God grants faith and repentance as gifts and distributes them to those whom He has unconditionally chosen. To suggest otherwise, as Arminians do, is to betray these texts.

So how do Arminians like Dave Hunt evade the clear testimony of Scripture that teaches faith and repentance are gifts from God? Regrettably, in his rebuttal, Hunt has no alternative but to turn the Bible into a pretzel. He wrote:

[The Bible] does not say that faith to believe is a gift without responsibility on man’s part, but that the privilege to believe on Christ has been granted. Yes, one of the fruits of the Spirit is faith, *but this is faith given to believers for living the Christian life, not faith given to the unsaved for believing the gospel.* ... Not one [verse in the Bible] clearly states that faith to believe unto salvation is a gift of God that causes sinners to believe the gospel (emphasis added).⁹

Astoundingly, when faced with over a half dozen verses that speak of saving faith as a divine grant, according to the will of God, Hunt has no choice but to create a straw-man argument. He actually fabricates two categories for faith to escape his quagmire. To him, as with many Arminians with whom he is in lockstep, the Bible supposedly sees a difference between the faith “to believe on Christ ... for living the Christian life” and the faith “to believe unto salvation.” Are we seriously expected to believe that the Bible distinguishes between the two—that faith in Christ (which enables faithful Christian living) somehow differs from salvific faith? God grants the former, Hunt concedes, but not the latter. Yet in what passage and in what manner the Bible actually differentiates between these two types of faith—to say nothing as to why God would graciously grant one and not the other—Hunt does not say.

In the end, the breadth and scope of Scripture sides with Reformed Theology. Man cannot lay claim to any aspect of the salvation process, to include the ability to repent and believe. If a person humbles himself to submit to God it is only because the Holy Spirit has granted that person the capability to do so. While God requires faith and repentance of *all* men, to be sure, He only gives them to those whom He has predestined, chosen, and elected.

It bears summarizing: Unconditional Election is the sovereign act of God whereby He graciously chose for Himself in Christ Jesus—and on account of His good pleasure—certain sinful people to be the recipients of His saving grace. And this He has done before the foundations of the world. Furthermore, those chosen to receive His grace will invariably arrive at faith in Christ—not through human decision, will, effort or foreseen merit (John 1:13; Rom. 9:16 cf. 9:11)—but on account of His sovereign decree. This beautiful picture of sovereignty drove Kay Arthur—an international Bible teacher, a four-time ECPA Christian Book Award winning author, and co-founder of *Precept Ministries International* (and arguably the premiere female Bible teacher in the Church today)—to confess the following:

God is the one that saves. I am not the Savior. I am the messenger. And God assures me [that] “*He that comes to me I will in no wise cast out—I will raise him up on the last day. You come to me because I have drawn you, because I have brought you*” and ... God doesn’t lose any of his sheep ... I know that God is sovereign over salvation. I know that I cannot save my child. I know that I cannot turn him from darkness to light. I know that only God can; and I know that if that’s God’s intention that God will accomplish it and that I am to rest and be about my Father’s business.¹⁰

Arthur is spot on. It is God who elects. It is God who predestines and chooses. It is God who draws. It is God who grants repentance. It is God who grants faith. And it is God who therefore grants salvation. For this reason the Scriptures can declare without apology, “It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor. 1:30). Like the believing remnant in Pisidian Antioch in Acts 13, the Elect in Christ inescapably repent and believe the preached gospel because God has ordained in eternity past that they should and gifted them in time and space with the capability to do so. Like Arthur, we

rest in the comfort that God is in control of all things; meanwhile we go humbly about our Father's business.

—Ronald H. Gann

¹ The apostle Thomas, also called "Didymus" was likely a twin: Thomas was not a proper name, but meant *twin* in Aramaic, as does "Didymus" in Greek.

² Tom Carter, *2,200 Quotations from the Writings of Charles H. Spurgeon*; (Family Christian Press, 1988); p. 175. Also see Charles Spurgeon, "The Marvelous Magnet"—Sermon No. 1717—Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

³ April 4, 2009 - Craig vs. Hitchens Debate from Biola University

⁴ Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*; (P & R Publishing, 1991)

⁵ R.C. Sproul, *The I AM Statements*, audio lecture; Legionnaire Ministries

⁶ Dave Hunt & James White, *Debating Calvinism*; (Multnomah Publishers, 2004); pp. 212-13

⁷ Blue Letter Bible. "Dictionary and Word Search for metanoia (Strong's 3341)". Blue Letter Bible. 1996-2012

⁸ Blue Letter Bible. "Dictionary and Word Search for *lagchanō* (Strong's 2975)". Blue Letter Bible. 1996-2011

⁹ Dave Hunt & James White, *Debating Calvinism*; (Multnomah Publishers, 2004); p. 213

¹⁰ Kay Arthur, *FamilyLife Today with Dennis Rainey, Healing for Marriage*: broadcast date: 3/16/2011