



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

Correspondence between a Roman Catholic priest and the Editor



Letter from Patrick McCafferty

Dear Mr Foster,

We have now reached the crux of this matter – Calvin’s false doctrine of predestination. This monstrous opinion is an affront to the God of Infinite Love. No soul is born to be damned! God sincerely wills the salvation of all people and gives all people sufficient grace to be saved. In fact, He warns us all, by conscience and by His commandments, against the very things that could destroy our eternal happiness. He would not warn us against the things that take us to hell if He wanted us to go there. He would keep silent about them and let us go over the precipice.

There is no predestination for damnation. Nor is it futile for an individual to endeavor to save his/her soul. God says even to the worst sinners, “Repent, and if your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made white as snow”. (Is1: 18). If a person is lost, it will solely be through their own fault. God may know that certain souls will choose to damn themselves, but He knows they have not got to do so, nor does His knowledge make them do so. Knowledge doesn’t cause an event, the event causes knowledge. Because Jim is running we know that he is running, but he certainly isn’t running because we know. God knows that a man will choose to lose his soul only because that man will so choose. There is no need for him to choose so disastrously. He receives sufficient grace for his conversion. Let him correspond with the Voice of God and of conscience, repenting of his sins, and he will be saved.

It is not futile for him to endeavor to save his soul and, if he is lost, it will be precisely because he did not endeavor to do so. Just imagine a farmer who says: ‘God knows whether I’m going to have a crop or not. If He knows, I’ll have it whatever I do. If He knows that I won’t have it, I won’t have it whatever I do. So I won’t plough, I won’t so any seed, it is futile’. Such a man is working on the absurd idea that knowledge causes the event instead of the event causing knowledge.

The Word of God is clear “HE WANTS EVERYONE TO BE SAVED AND REACH FULL KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH” (I Tim 2: 4). Also Ezekiel 18: 23: “Would I take pleasure in the death of the wicked – it is the Lord Who speaks – and not prefer to see him renounce his wickedness and live?” Peter said to Cornelius’ household: “the Truth I have now come to realize is that God has no favourites, but that anybody of any nationality who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him” (Acts 10: 34). See also I Peter 1: 17, Rms 2: 11 and Gal 2: 6. Paul tells us plainly that “He is the Saviour of the WHOLE HUMAN RACE but particularly of all believers” (I Tim 4: 10); and “God’s grace has been revealed to save the WHOLE HUMAN RACE” (Titus 2: 11).

It is an evil and false theory that would dare to suggest that God, Who created the human person in His own image and likeness, would willfully destine multitudes of humanity for hell. The Blood of Jesus Christ, shed for ALL (Mt 26: 28) on the Cross, declares that this opinion is utterly wrong. You, however, Mr Foster need this theory of Calvin’s to make sense of your spiritual worldview and to interpret the Scriptures which, you allege, do not



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teach what I claim. The plain Word of God refutes you. If your view of salvation is true, then most of the God's Word is rendered obsolete and meaningless. For those who are going to be lost no matter what, it is pointless to read His Word; and for those "elect" who are certain they are saved no matter what, there is no need to read His Word - its injunctions are superfluous. This stance is ludicrous and untenable. You wrote: "It is no argument to trawl through the Holy Scriptures and quote verses warning of the dreadful consequences awaiting those that profess faith in Christ but then fall away, if we are erroneously claiming that the verses teach something they do not.

They do not teach what you claim. They are warnings to those who lightly assume a profession of Christianity but whose hearts have never been truly regenerated. They are addressed to that multitude of which Christ speaks in Matthew 7:21-23. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." They do not teach what I claim? So say you. Christ, however, is also warning those who think they are "saved" to beware lest on the Day they too find themselves on the receiving end of His "depart from Me". As the Apostle wrote: "If any man thinks himself to stand let him take heed lest he fall". Your reference to I Cor 12:28-34 is no proof of your argument being true. The punishments of which Paul speaks are sent as a lesson so that people may reform themselves before the Last Judgement. "We are corrected by the Lord to save us from being condemned along with the world" Evidently, the Lord would not need to so correct His people were it not possible for them to ultimately be "condemned along with the world", by their persistent sinful rebellion.

Within the Church of God there exists the wheat and the chaff. One Day, "He will clear His threshing floor and gather His wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn in a fire that will never go out" (Mt3:12). We must ensure that we are pure wheat for Christ. Then, on the Day of Judgement, we will declare with all the redeemed: "See this is our God in Whom we HOPED for salvation. The Lord is the One in whom we have HOPED. We exult and we rejoice that He has saved us". (Is 25:9).

Yours sincerely,

Patrick McCafferty.

Reply from Ivan Foster

Dear Mr. McCafferty,

"The crux of this matter", as you put it, is not predestination but how the sinner is saved. You have repeatedly claimed that we must, by our works, labour to get into heaven. Christ's death on the cross is not sufficient of itself but we must "cooperate" with God in our salvation. That teaching I say is not what the Bible sets forth. Your views on Predestination come as no surprise, but that is not the topic that gave rise to this exchange. Before concentrating upon the true subject of this debate, I will, however, quote a few verses on the topic of God acting sovereignly. "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy,



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and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" Romans 9: 14-21. It is vain of man to say what God is or what God purposed and willed outside of that revealed of Him in the Bible. Our idea of how love should work and how mercy should work and how justice should work are the ideas of totally depraved and fallen men. It is our duty to bring our minds under the rule of God's Word rather than seeking to reassemble the Bible so that it appears to support our notions.

But back to what the Bible says about the obtaining of eternal life by the sinner. I have repeatedly attempted to show you that, according to the Bible, we are all, by nature, spiritually dead and thus incapable of doing anything toward obtaining eternal life. Can the rotting corpse in the grave contribute to its resurrection? Eternal life is given of God in the same fashion as life was given to the corpse of Lazarus (John 11:39-44). I have reiterated this point time and again, but you have never addressed it or attempted to explain how the dead soul may contribute to its own resurrection. I must ask you to concentrate on this matter for this is the true crux of our discussion.

How does the dead soul assist in its own resurrection?

Life is imparted by God in a sovereign fashion just as Christ imparted healing to the impotent man of John 5: 1-15. The man did not know or believe on Christ and Christ healed only him and then departed from the pool. How dare sinful man say that such a procedure is contrary to justice or that all should have been healed or at least given the opportunity to apply for healing? I cannot tell why Christ acted so other than to say it pleased Him Who is all-wise and the God of "all grace" (1 Peter 5: 10) to act so and I bow before His displayed and manifested will. Indeed, what further understanding could I desire! I believe the Bible when it says: "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Timothy 1:9).

The spiritual life that Christ imparts to the dead soul that He quickens, is eternal and abundant. "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John 10:28). "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). The life thus imparted cannot end. In its essence it is eternal. It need not be maintained by man for it cannot end. It is the very life of God within the regenerated soul (Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 4:18). The evidence of this imparted life is the soul beginning to exercise faith and repentance. It obeys the gospel and walks in submission to Christ's revealed will. It is thus showing that it is alive in Christ Jesus. That exercising of faith and repentance, that walking in holy obedience, is not in order to obtain life but is evidence that life has begun. Before a soul can believe and obey it must be alive. Yet



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you persist in saying that you believe and obey in order to be made alive.

Can you explain how faith and obedience may be exercised by a soul dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1) in order to assist in its own resurrection? Whence comes this power to exercise faith and obedience within the dead soul?

Following upon its resurrection, the regenerated soul will instinctively walk in obedience to God. God has illustrated this simple fact by endowing the creatures of this world with certain inherent instincts which are exercised without learning or copying from their progenitors. As the flower turns to the sun, so the newly regenerated believer turns to Christ, His ordinances and His people when quickened (Acts 2:41-42, 9:17-22).

Christ has warned that many false disciples will attach themselves to His church. They are the result of the deceptions of the devil. They are the wheat-like tares amongst the true wheat. The Saviour issued many warnings about such and stated that the only true mark of the genuine believer is a persevering in the way of holiness. Such perseverance is the direct and immediate result of God working within the heart and soul of His people.

“Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13). If there is a falling away manifested, it is a signal to the person in whom it is detected that he may, after all, be only a mere professor of religion and not a possessor of life in Christ. The true believer who stumbles and backslides will return to Christ in obedience to the promptings and strivings of the Holy Spirit, which will be what the true believer, who has backslidden, will be experiencing. If, on the other hand, the wayward professor of Christ can live in the state of carelessness and disobedience, they are not true believers and the fires of damnation await them.

That is a very much simplified summary of the matter, subject to the shortcomings all summaries have.

Thus the warnings issued by Christ are not evidences that the genuine believer may be lost. Rather the warnings of Christ are the means that the all-wise God employs to effectively preserve His people from waywardness by granting to them the grace to desire holiness and dread and fear sin and its consequences. The true believer will, by the grace of God effectively working in his regenerated soul, be preserved while the impostor will, as “the dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire” (2 Peter 2:22), return to his natural environment of sin. Thus Christians confirm the genuineness of their faith by submitting to the strivings of the Spirit within them that prompts obedience to the Holy Scriptures. When they have done that, they will then gladly recognise that their returning was not something they wrought of themselves, but was rather the workings of God’s grace through the Holy Scriptures, thus promoting obedience.

The keeping of the Christian is claimed by God. “While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled” (John 17:12).

The keeping of the Christian is the work of God, say the sacred writers. “He will keep the feet of his saints” (1 Samuel 2:9). “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and



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he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand. . . . For the LORD loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off" (Psalm 37:23-24, 28). "Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called" (Jude 1:1). It is not our holding on to Him but His hold on us that preserves us. "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them" (Deuteronomy 33:27). I await your specific responses to the underlined questions.

Yours sincerely,

Ivan Foster.