

## Books in Review

### *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*

General Editor, Clark Pinnock

Although the Bible clearly teaches the sovereignty (governance) of God over his creation, it also just as clearly teaches the God-given free will of man and the responsibility of man for his own decisions and actions. It is precisely because of these two truths that God will one day be able to judge the world in righteousness and truth. Unfortunately, God's sovereignty and man's free will have often been misunderstood resulting in skewed systems of theological thought. Chief among these skewed systems of thought are the Augustinian (4th cent.) or Calvinistic (16th cent.) beliefs regarding the biblical concepts of foreknowledge, election and predestination which still hold great influence in the thinking of many today. Simply stated these beliefs portray God as foreordaining (predestining) each *individual* person - apart from that person's own free will choice - to a pre-determined final destiny of either salvation or damnation.

An excellent book, *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, edited by Clark Pinnock (Bethany House Pub., 1995), challenges these views on biblical grounds. It deals extensively with the biblical subjects of God's sovereignty and man's free will along with the corresponding concepts of foreknowledge, election and predestination. The book is a collection of articles by fifteen different biblical scholars on these subjects. Although the writers do not see eye to eye on every aspect of these topics (e.g. three views of God's foreknowledge are presented), they share the belief that biblical election and predestination are first and foremost *corporate*, rather than individual,

concepts. In short, they believe that the biblical concepts of election and predestination are that God has foreordained a plan to redeem "in Christ" a people for himself and that all who freely choose to participate are incorporated into that people (i.e. the church) - through faith in Christ. In that sense, they become part of God's "elect" and share in all the blessings and responsibilities of God's foreordained "people."

This book also does a good job of showing the ever-present influence of Greek philosophy and Gnostic thinking on the post NT development of many of these doctrines. In a separate book *The Early Church*, Henry Chadwick, a scholar of early church history, summarizes Gnostic beliefs concerning redemption which form a background to the post NT development of these doctrines:

The influence of fatalistic ideas drawn from popular astrology and magic became fused with notions derived from Pauline language about predestination to produce a rigid deterministic scheme. Redemption was from destiny, not from the consequences of responsible action, and was granted to a pre-determined elect in whom alone was the divine spark ... The Gnostic initiates were people of the spirit, the elect, whose salvation was certain and indefectible (The Early Church, p.38).

It is part of the task of *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* to undo the influence of such thinking on our understanding of the biblical terms and concepts involved in these topics.

The chief emphasis of this book, however, is the portrayal of God as a personal being who *truly* "desires for *all* men to be saved and come unto a knowledge of the truth" (I Tim. 2:4). Because of his love for mankind God has predetermined a plan and executed this plan through his Son - thus making salvation available to *all* who desire to participate in it. In contrast to the sham of the Calvinist idea of

God's predestination of each individual to an eternal destiny apart from their own free will choice, the biblical truth is shown by this book to be precisely as stated in the most familiar verse of all: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that *whoever* believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). This verse clearly is an *open* invitation to *all*, with acceptance or rejection

based on the free will of each individual. Thus, in the biblical scheme each individual *freely chooses* to participate, or not, in God's foreordained plan. This is the "gospel of God's grace" - open to *all* who choose to believe.

[[Click here](#) for the link to this book on Amazon.com]