

MIDWESTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

A CONSIDERATION OF THE VIEWS OF CHARLES H. SPURGEON AND JOHN S. PIPER,
AS PASTORS AND THEOLOGIANS, CONCERNING THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION
AND PREDESTINATION IN THE ONGOING DEBATE OF ARMINIANISM VS.
CALVINISM

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Introduction

As a three-year-young Christian I was introduced to Systematic Theology while in my first year of seminary. The matters we covered encouraged extra conversations about the concepts of election, free agency, depravity, Calvinism and Arminianism. The Lord further shaped my thinking about the concepts through two classes, *The Doctrine of Sin* and *The Doctrine of Salvation*. While taking a homiletics class, I was required to read *Lecture to my Students*, by Charles H. Spurgeon, in which he wrote:

For a man to come shuffling into a College, pretending that he holds his mind open to any form of truth, and that he is eminently receptive, but has not settled in his mind such things as whether God has an election of grace, or whether he loves his people to the end, seems to me to be a perfect monstrosity.¹

Spurgeon emphasized the importance of developing a good understanding and strong convictions on these doctrines. Several years later I read *Desiring God* by John Piper. In this work Piper referred to Spurgeon on several occasions. He referenced the views of Spurgeon on prayer, suffering, the sovereignty of God, and missions.² Reading the works of Spurgeon and Piper, their sermons, and considering their views on theological issues, my thinking was shaped about the doctrines of grace, specifically from a pastoral perspective. Spurgeon and Piper, being Baptists, offer unique perspectives in a debate on the doctrine of election and predestination that “is not going away.”³ Each man also faced strong challenges to their doctrinal views of

¹ Spurgeon, Charles, H. *Lectures To My Students*. Vol. Volume 1. (Rio, WI: Ages Software, 2000), 46.

² Piper, John. *Desiring God: meditations of a Christian Hedonist*. (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books 1996), 162-3, 237, 266, 344-5.

³ Allen, David Lewis, Eric Hankins, and Adam Harwood. *Anyone Can Be Saved: A Defense of “traditional” Southern Baptist Soteriology*. (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2016), 13.

Calvinism⁴. In their respective eras, both Spurgeon and Piper also ministered while cultural perspectives and beliefs changed, which undermined the authority of Scripture and led to further compromise on doctrinal matters in the Christian community at large.

Iain Murray, a prominent scholar on Spurgeon, wrote *The Forgotten Spurgeon*⁵. Murray identified particular struggles that Spurgeon faced with higher critics as the combining of evangelicalism and theological liberalism occurred.⁶ Spurgeon recognized that the doctrines of Calvinism were important to future generations if the trend were to be reversed.⁷ Great Britain faced several challenges in the nineteenth-century, especially in the area of religion. Calvinists, like Spurgeon, and other conservative pastors sought to fight against the new liberal theology that was impacting both the cultural and religious circles.⁸ It was said that “old doctrines that would humble humans before a king-like God became harder to sell.” In other words, the gospel of Jesus Christ that emphasized the sovereignty of God was not as readily accepted by the masses and made the task for pastors in that era more difficult.

⁴ “John Piper Continues to Confuse Followers on Justification.” Blog. *Pulpit & Pen* (blog), March 2, 2018. <https://pulpitandpen.org/2018/03/02/john-piper-continues-confuse-followers-justification/>.

Piper, John. *Will We Be Finally ‘Saved’ by Faith Alone?* Audio Transcript, n.d. <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/will-we-be-finally-saved-by-faith-alone>.

Murray, Iain Hamish. *The Forgotten Spurgeon*. (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), 179-80.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid. 187.

⁷ Ibid. 26.

⁸ Rountree III, J. Clarke. “Charles Haddon Spurgeon’s Calvinist Rhetoric of Election: Consulting an Elect.” *Journal of Communication & Religion* 17, no. 2 (September 1994), 33.

Piper experienced a similar cultural shift in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Though ministering approximately one hundred years after Spurgeon, there was a similar shift in the culture against the matters of religion. In large, science took precedence over and against the authority of Scripture and there was a shift away from biblical absolutes as governing truths.⁹ During his ministry, Piper made one of his greatest goals to preach on the supremacy of God in all things. His Calvinistic viewpoint proved an influential and important part of his teaching and writing.

Spurgeon and Piper each accomplished some unusual, yet similar feats. Each man pastored for an unusually long number of years in their respective churches. A lengthy tenure in the same church is not the norm for most pastors, especially in the modern era.¹⁰ Spurgeon began pastoring the New Park Street Church in 1854 and shepherded that same body for almost 40 years until his death.¹¹ It was this same church body that moved to The Metropolitan Tabernacle

⁹ Boice, James, Montgomery. *Give Me That Book!* 1st ed. Vol. Romans. 27 vols. Boice Expositional Commentary Series. (Baker Books, 1998).

“So-Called Same-Sex Marriage: Lamenting the New Calamity.” Desiring God, (June 26, 2015), <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/so-called-same-sex-marriage>.

“John Piper: Celebrating Homosexual Sin Isn’t New but Institutionalization of It Is.” <https://www.christianpost.com/news/john-piper-celebrating-homosexual-sin-isnt-new-but-institutionalization-of-it-is.html>.

¹⁰ “Six Reasons Pastoral Tenure May Be Increasing.” ThomRainer.com, (March 15, 2017), <https://thomrainer.com/2017/03/six-reasons-pastoral-tenure-may-be-increasing/>.

¹¹ Dallimore, Arnold A. *Spurgeon: A New Biography*. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 43.

in London in March of 1861.¹² Piper too had a lengthy ministry at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, MN beginning in 1980 until he retired in 2013.¹³

Spurgeon preached and wrote to the degree that he is considered as “history’s most widely read preacher” providing more written material than any other Christian author.¹⁴ Piper has also preached over twelve-hundred sermons that can be accessed at the desiringgod.org website and through multiple Bible software programs. Piper has also written over ninety books, contributed chapters to many others, communicated by writing blogs, and answered questions on the desiringgod.org website.¹⁵

Finally, both Spurgeon and Piper were instrumental in establishing institutions for training future pastors and ministers of the gospel. Spurgeon started the Pastors College with one student in 1856 after hiring Congregationalist George Rogers as the primary teacher.¹⁶ Likewise, Piper transitioned a lay leaders institute from Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, MN to become a fully accredited university and seminary in 2009 known as Bethlehem College and Seminary.¹⁷

¹² Dallimore, Arnold A. *Spurgeon: A New Biography*. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 97.

¹³ “Who Is John Piper? Everything You Need to Know.” <https://www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/john-piper-1953.php>.

¹⁴ Hayden, Eric W. “Did You Know?” *Christian History* 10, no. 1 (February 1991), 2.

¹⁵ “John Piper Bibliography.” Desiring God, (June 15, 2014), <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/john-piper-bibliography>.

¹⁶ Dallimore, Arnold A. *Spurgeon: A New Biography*. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 104.

¹⁷ “Bethlehem History.” *Bethlehem College and Seminary*. <https://bcsmn.edu/about/history/>.

The goal in this paper will be to analyze the views of Spurgeon and Piper on the doctrine of election, showing how these two Baptist pastors communicated the doctrine of Calvinism, specifically the doctrine of election and predestination as essential for evangelism and the health of the church.¹⁸ Both Spurgeon and Piper possessed prominent voices about the doctrinal issue of election and predestination, especially from the perspective of pastors as theologians. Integrating their voices into the modern debate will provide unique insight, but more importantly it will help bring two influential voices into the ongoing debate and provide encouragement for pastors to speak into the debate, first with their flocks in preaching and teaching, second in other areas of teaching and writing articles or blogs, and third in the emphasis of evangelism and missions in the life of the modern church.

Methodology of Research

Charles H. Spurgeon and John S. Piper, being pastors and prolific writers, provide numerous resources to examine their positions on Calvinism, particularly the doctrine of election and predestination. In order to bring them into the debate on election appropriately, it will be necessary to consider the historical arguments from the writings of John Calvin and James Arminius as well as the statements that Augustine and Pelagian made regarding the doctrine. Most systematic theologies identify the key thoughts of Calvin and Arminius when addressing the issue of divine election. Therefore, it will also be necessary to consider the views of scholars who have written systematic theologies. There are other independent works that address the topic

¹⁸ Piper, John. "Pastoral Thoughts on the Doctrine of Election." Accordance electronic ed., (November 20, 2003), Paragraph 56708. "The doctrine of election has a strong tendency to make a church rigorous about the truth and about the Scriptures, and so keep it from drifting into doctrinal indifference and conformity to culture."

of election and predestination that must be considered. Finally, it will be necessary to include modern works in relationship to the works of Spurgeon and Piper.

The pastoral perspectives of Spurgeon and Piper will be noted in a manner different than the address from a scholarly perspective only. Therefore, it will be necessary to compare and contrast the views of Spurgeon and Piper as they included or emphasized the doctrines in sermons. In order to compare their respective sermons, an analysis will be done to determine which passages of Scripture were taught by both men, then conclusions will be made about their respective views. The comparison and analysis of the teachings of Spurgeon and Piper will be inserted into the debate. Their unique perspectives on similar passages will also help to show the importance of the doctrine for current pastors and their churches. The conclusions will be contextually specific in each of their time periods and it will be important to relate those conclusions to the church moving into the next part of the twenty-first century, enlightening readers on the matters of church health, evangelism, the preaching of doctrine, and more.

One might ask the following questions about the reason for this work: Why Now? Why these two men? Is this a relevant subject? Can these pastoral perspectives offer insightful perspectives? How can Christians on each side of the debate relate properly? The research, analysis, comparisons, and inclusion in the debate will attempt to answer these questions and others.

It is vital to begin by answering the first question, “Why now?” In 2004 InterVarsity Press published two books, *Why I’m not an Arminian*, and *Why I’m not a Calvinist*.¹⁹ In 2009, James R. White published *The Potter’s Freedom* in response to *Chosen But Free*, by Norman

¹⁹ Peterson, Robert A, and Michael D Williams. *Why I Am Not an Arminian*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 13.

Geisler, which was published in 2001.²⁰ In 2011 the conversation on the doctrine of election continued to develop through the works of Michael Horton in his book *For Calvinism* and Roger Olson in his book *Against Calvinism*, works both published by Zondervan.²¹

There are two clear conclusions to offer in answer to the question “Why now?”. First, this debate is not ending anytime soon.²² Second, there are scholars on each side of the Arminianism vs. Calvinism debate who continue addressing the issues while defending their beliefs and interpretation of Scriptures.

Doctrine is an important issue to consider because the “contracting” or decreasing value placed on the authority of Scripture.²³ The Barna Group research continues to show the populace has an increase in skepticism about the inerrancy and sufficiency of the Bible and its ability to provide wisdom for “living a meaningful life.”²⁴ This lack of confidence in biblical authority is producing a negative trend in the church and negating efforts to share the gospel. The Scriptures are no longer seen as the foundational truths that can be offered as authoritative. Instead, there is a syncretism of psychology, philosophy, and spiritualism that undermines the true message of the

²⁰ White, James R. *The Potter’s Freedom: A Defense of the Reformation and a Rebuttal of Norman Geisler’s Chosen but Free*. (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2009).

²¹ Olson, Roger E. *Against Calvinism*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

Horton, Michael. *For Calvinism*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

²² Waggoner, Brad J., and E. Ray Clendenen. *Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue*. (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2008), 9.

²³ “The Bible in America: 6-Year Trends.” Barna Group. <https://www.barna.com/research/the-bible-in-america-6-year-trends/>.

²⁴ “State of the Bible 2017: Top Findings.” Barna Group. <https://www.barna.com/research/state-bible-2017-top-findings/>.

Gospel of Jesus Christ.²⁵ In the culture of the twenty-first-century the trend is for more people to consider the Bible as mythological.²⁶ Though the overall cultural response to the authority of the Bible seems to be moving positively in the direction of belief that the Bible is accurate, when pressed on specific issues like sin or morality the statistic does not hold the same positive movement.²⁷

Therefore, the challenge facing the contemporary church in her efforts to be salt and light in evangelistic efforts is significant. Pastors need to be aware of these trends so that their pulpit ministries emphasize the importance of doctrine while instilling confidence in the church member's ability to handle doctrinal matters regarding the gospel message, Scripture as authority, and the importance of the Great Commission. Daniel Akin insisted that we need a "balance of a Great Commission theology" as we "join in an unbreakable and permanent union the twin disciplines of theology and missions."²⁸

Both Spurgeon and Piper emphasized the importance of evangelism and missions in their respective ministries while identifying the importance of training people to be ministers of the gospel. Spurgeon stated the following in his address at the Final Pastors' College Conference in 1891:

²⁵ Wright, R K McGregor. *No Place for Sovereignty: What's Wrong with Freewill Theism*. (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 12.

²⁶ "State of the Bible 2017: Top Findings." Barna Group. <https://www.barna.com/research/state-bible-2017-top-findings/>.

²⁷ "Americans' Theology Is a Mix of Orthodox Belief and Shifting Opinions." *LifeWay Research* (blog), October 17, 2018. <https://lifewayresearch.com/2018/10/17/americans-theology-is-a-mix-of-orthodox-belief-and-shifting-opinions/>.

²⁸ Daniel Akin, "Answering the Call to a Great Commission Resurgence," in *Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue*, eds. E. Ray Clendenen and Brad J. Waggoner (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2008), 256-7.

We want a church of a missionary character, which will go forth to gather out a people unto God from all parts of the world. A church is a soul-saving company or it is nothing. If the salt exercises no preserving influence on that which surrounds it, what is the use of it?²⁹

In a similar tone Piper writes in his book, *Let the Nations Be Glad!:*

Tom Steller and I love Jesus Christ, we love the church, and we love missionaries. Our united prayer and commitment, from the home base of a missions-mobilizing local church, and the newly founded Bethlehem College and Seminary, is that God will be merciful to us and make our labors fruitful for Christ's "Imperial Majesty." May he raise up generations of world Christians who are willing to lay down their lives to make the nations glad in the glory of God through Jesus Christ.³⁰

Therefore, these two men offer unique insight into the importance of evangelism for the modern church. The growth of the churches that were pastored by Spurgeon and Piper and the significant influence for the gospel establish reasons to evaluate and analyze their sermons and other writings. The modern pastor can better understand theological perspectives and the importance of teaching doctrinal truths to enhance the biblical health of his own church.

Charles Spurgeon is considered to be the "last of the Puritans," or "the heir to the Puritans" - titles bestowed on him because of his extensive reading of Puritan theologians.³¹ There were approximately seven thousand Puritan works in his library of over twelve thousand volumes.³² He was influenced by Puritan writers like John Gill, John Owens, Jonathan Edwards, and Stephen Charnock. The Puritans focused on the doctrines of Calvin, and through the

²⁹ Spurgeon, Charles, H. *The Greatest Fight in the World: The Final Manifesto.* (Scotland, United Kingdom: Christian Focus Publications, Ltd, 2014), 99.

³⁰ Piper, John. *Let the Nations Be Glad!: The Supremacy of God in Missions.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 12.

³¹ Bacon, Ernest. *Spurgeon Heir of the Puritans.* (Arlington Heights, IL: Christian Liberty Press, 1996), 107.

³² Ibid.

Puritans' teaching, "the greatest and most pervasive revivals" were experienced in England and Scotland.³³ The doctrinal positions held by Spurgeon were developed by his careful and continual reading of the Puritans, which led to his own evangelistic efforts in the pulpit and in public.³⁴

Likewise, John Piper was greatly influenced by Puritan theologians. In his work, *The Future of Justification*, Piper refers to Puritan writers like John Owen and Jonathan Edwards.³⁵ In the book, *Desiring God*, Piper acknowledged that Jonathan Edwards is one of the "heroes" of the book who "deeply savored the sweet sovereignty of God."³⁶ Piper also acknowledged Edwards influence on his life as he referenced a journal article he had written for the Reformed

³³ Boice, James, Montgomery. *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive and Reliable Overview of Christian Beliefs*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 519.

³⁴ Spurgeon, Charles, H. "Election," No. 41-42. September 2, 1855. (Rio, WI. Ages Software, 2000), 548. In reference to 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 Spurgeon wrote, "If there were no other text in the sacred word except this one, I think we should all be bound to receive and acknowledge the truthfulness of the great and glorious doctrine of God's ancient choice of his family. But there seems to be an inveterate prejudice in the human mind against this doctrine; and although most other doctrines will be received by professing Christians, some with caution, others with pleasure, yet this one seems to be most frequently disregarded and discarded. In many of our pulpits it would be reckoned a high sin and treason to preach a sermon upon election, because they could not make it what they call a "practical" discourse. I believe they have erred from the truth therein. Whatever God has revealed, he has revealed for a purpose. There is nothing in Scripture which may not, under the influence of God's Spirit, be turned into a practical discourse: "for all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable" for some purpose of spiritual usefulness. It is true, it may not be turned into a free-will discourse—that we know right well—but it can be turned into a practical free-grace discourse: and free-grace practice is the best practice, when the true doctrines of God's immutable love are brought to bear upon the hearts of saints and sinners."

³⁵ Piper, John. *The Future of Justification*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 24-5.

³⁶ Piper, John. *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*. (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1996), 9.

Journal and republished on the Desiring God website.³⁷ Piper wrote, *God's Passion for His Own Glory*, which was an analysis of the theology of Jonathan Edwards. Piper stated, “Edwards’s relentless God-centeredness and devotion to the Biblical contours of doctrine are profoundly needed in our day.”³⁸ Furthermore, in *21 Servants of Sovereign Joy*, Piper wrote on several other Puritans like John Owen, John Bunyan, and George Whitefield.³⁹

The Puritans greatly influenced both Spurgeon and Piper in doctrinal matters and the reach of the Puritans extended into the practices of evangelism throughout the world. Historian Iain Murray wrote of, “Methodist historian, William Warren Sweet, that ‘most of the great American Revival moments have come through the Puritans.’”⁴⁰

In order to rightly consider the conclusions and teachings of Spurgeon and Piper it will be necessary to look at key works of the Puritans who wrote on doctrinal matters and held evangelistic influence. Examining the Puritan influence will also bridge the relationship of Spurgeon and Piper, connecting them to the modern church because Puritan theologians continue to influence much of the thinking of current scholarship.

The Arminianism vs. Calvinism debate originated in the exchange between Augustine and Pelagius. Cornelius P. Venema identified that the Reformation was “rooted in a long-

³⁷ “A Personal Encounter with Jonathan Edwards.” Desiring God, (November 1, 1978), <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/a-personal-encounter-with-jonathan-edwards>.

³⁸ Piper, John. *God's Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards, with the Complete Text of The End for Which God Created the World*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), xiii.

³⁹ Piper, John. *21 Servants of Sovereign Joy: Faithful, Flawed, and Fruitful*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018).

⁴⁰ Murray, Iain Hamish. *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750-1858*. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994). 85.

standing Augustinian legacy.”⁴¹ The legacy of Augustine was formed partially by his response to the Pelagian letters. Pelagius believed that because there is freedom in the will even the capacity to “do evil itself is good; evil actions are themselves the signs of the goodness of God.”⁴² Augustine answered the letters of the Pelagians and countered that the free will of man was lost when man sinned in the garden of Eden and man now needs the grace of God to intervene, so that the ability to be free from sin is accomplished.⁴³ Augustine derived this conclusion by his interpretation of Romans 6:20. The debate is further clarified in the introductory remarks made by Augustine:

Wherein the truth of predestination and grace is defended against the semi-Pelagians, — those people to wit, who by no means withdraw altogether from the Pelagian heresy, in that they contend that the beginning of salvation and of faith is of ourselves; so that in virtue, as it were, of this precedent merit, the other good gifts of God are attained.⁴⁴

In this same letter, Augustine later identified that the very beginning of our faith is derived from God and is therefore an extension of the grace of God. Augustine noted that Paul wrote in Romans 11:36, “For from him and through him and to him are all things.” (Romans 11:36 ESV) Augustine interpreted this verse to mean that faith is a gift from God. In contrast, “Pelagius reacted by saying that whatever God commands implies the ability of the one who

⁴¹ Horton, Michael Scott, and Matthew Barrett. *Reformation Theology: A Systematic Summary*. (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2017), 244.

⁴² Evans, Robert F. *Four Letters of Pelagius*. (New York: Seabury Press, 1968).

⁴³ Augustine, Saint. *Saint Augstin's Anti-Pelagian Works*. Edited by Philip Schaff. Translators Peter Holmes and Robert Ernest Wallis. Vol. Book 1 Chapter 5. (Rio, WI. Ages Software, 2000), 927.

⁴⁴ Augustine, Aurelius. *A Treatise on the Predestination of the Saints*. (Rio, WI. Ages Software, 2000), 1174.

receives the command to obey it.”⁴⁵ In other words, in creating us, God gave us every ability we need to respond to him in obedience and there is no need of grace for our salvation, grace merely enhances our obedience to God.

This exchange of ideas produced the foundational thoughts for what was later addressed by the Reformers in the sixteenth-century. James Arminius and John Calvin were two predominant theologians who exchanged thoughts on doctrine during the Reformation. The result of the exchange of theological ideas in the debate became monumental and today the controversy is most often identified as the Arminianism vs. Calvinism debate.

The most polarizing issues of the debate focus on the doctrine of predestination and election. Both Calvin and Arminius possessed strong opinions about these two ideas. In order to see how Spurgeon and Piper relate to the ongoing debate it will be necessary to understand the two opposing views of Arminius and Calvin. One issue, for Arminius, was the foreknowledge of God and how this related to faith. In his work, *Apology or Defense*, Arminius wrote, “Faith is not an effect of election, but is a necessary requisite foreseen by God in those who are to be elected. And the decree concerning the bestowing of faith precedes the decree of election.”⁴⁶ Calvin interpreted foreknowledge and election differently. Calvin wrote, “we were adopted in Christ into the eternal inheritance because in ourselves we were not capable of such great excellence.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ “The Pelagian Controversy by R.C. Sproul.” Ligonier Ministries. <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/pelagian-controversy/>.

⁴⁶ Arminius, James. *The Works of James Arminius, The Apology or Defense*. Version 1.0. Vol. 1. The Apology or Defense. (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1997), 246.

⁴⁷ Calvin, John. *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The Library of Christian Classics. Vol. 2. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 934.

He also concluded that it is the will of the Lord that the contemplation of election for the Christian should focus on nothing but the “mere goodness” of God.⁴⁸

The previous statements by Arminius and Calvin provide a brief and simple perspective on the debate. In summary, the debate arises from differing views on the nature of man, his ability to respond to God in faith, and the character and nature of the person of God in his rule and relationship to mankind. The issues are raised by the biblical terms of predestination, election, foreknowledge, and chosen, terms which must be carefully considered through the study of the original languages and usage.

The doctrine of election and predestination is one that permeates every aspect of theology. Alister McGrath says, “the saving action of God in Jesus Christ stands in the center of the gospel proclamation” and “allows us to assign priorities to certain doctrines,” the doctrine of predestination being one such priority.⁴⁹ Therefore, it is necessary to consider a broad array of theologians and the positions revealed on these doctrines.

The approach taken by most systematic theologians in the early to middle twentieth-century was to present the various views on certain doctrinal issues apart from stating their opinions clearly. Henry Thiessen, who taught at Wheaton College, was one such writer. In *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, Thiessen presents two basic views on election. He presents the views of “Election Based on Prescience” and “Election Based on Choice.”⁵⁰ According to a footnote, the position held by Thiessen was “Election Based on Prescience,” which is the

⁴⁸ Ibid. 943.

⁴⁹ McGrath, Alister, E. *Justification by Faith*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 151.

⁵⁰ Thiessen, Henry C. *Lectures in Systematic Theology*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 458-62.

Arminian view of election. In the midst of his explanation of election Thiessen rightly identifies that this Christian church is “divided on the understanding of this doctrine.”⁵¹

Millard J. Erickson also approached the doctrine of election directly. In *Christian Theology*, he expressed that the doctrine of predestination is “one of the most puzzling and least understood” doctrines.⁵² Erickson traced the history of the doctrine before presenting the differing views. He introduced the reader to the views of an Augustinian monk, named Martin Luther, who wrote a commentary on Romans that stirred a response from the pope who committed Erasmus to refute the views of Luther. Erickson addressed how Erasmus wrote, *The Freedom of the Will*, which was published in 1524 and in the following year, Luther published *The Bondage of the Will* in response to Erasmus. Finally, Erickson traced three views on the doctrine of predestination and election by addressing Calvinism, Arminianism, and Karl Barth.⁵³

Erickson revealed the development of the debate on the doctrine of election and predestination that took place historically. However, his outline is not current and will require further expansion. It is important to rightly understand the development of the theological ideas to the time of Spurgeon and recognize that there is further development to the time of Piper. Again, the ongoing development of the ideas establishes a meaningful background to insert the views of Spurgeon and Piper within.

It is necessary to consider the works of specific Puritans like John Gill, John Owen, Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, and George Whitefield. From that list, it is appropriate to begin

⁵¹ Ibid. 258.

⁵² Erickson, Millard, J. *Christian Theology*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), 907.

⁵³ Ibid. 914-24.

with John Gill who was pastor that Spurgeon followed at New Park Street Chapel. Gill was a Baptist who was also a Calvinist and had significant influence because he was the first Baptist to compose an entire systematic theology.⁵⁴ He additionally wrote a commentary on the entire Bible in a verse-by-verse format.⁵⁵ There is some debate regarding Gill being a hyper-Calvinist. Gill wrote a four-part work, *The Cause of God and Truth*, in response to the attack on Calvinism made by Daniel Whitby in *Discourses on the Five Points*.⁵⁶ Gill referenced Matthew 22:14, “For many are called, but few are chosen,” (Matthew 22:14 ESV) and interpreted the choosing to be that “which does not express any act of man’s, such as accepting Christ, and embracing the faith of him, but God’s act, to whom alone, and not man, election is always ascribed in scripture; and, therefore, the elect are called God’s elect, and his own elect.”⁵⁷ It is important to recognize that Spurgeon spoke with great appreciation for Gill. Spurgeon referenced the works of Gill with respect and overall agreement. Yet he disagreed with Gill on some matters and criticized Gill as he concluded that Gill was a hyper-Calvinist because Gill was unwilling to give general invitations.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ George, Timothy, and David S. Dockery. *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*. (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 12.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 25.

⁵⁷ Gill, John. *The Cause of God and Truth*. (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 1999), 249.

⁵⁸ Murray, Iain H. *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism: The Battle for Gospel Preaching*. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1995), 125-26.

In contrast to the Calvinistic theology of John Gill there was John Wesley, one of the most influential pastors and theologians of the eighteenth-century. Wesley wrote the following statement about original sin:

Perhaps you will say, they are not condemned for actual but for original sin. What do you mean by this term? The inward corruption of our nature? If so, it has been spoken of before. Or do you mean, the sin which Adam committed in paradise? That this is imputed to all men, I allow; yea, that by reason hereof “the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” But that any will be damned for this alone, I allow not, till you show me where it is written. Bring me plain proof from Scripture, and I submit; but till then I utterly deny it.⁵⁹

George Whitefield also pastored in the eighteenth-century as a contemporary of Wesley. Whitfield and Wesley held differing views on the doctrine of election and predestination. Therefore, it is necessary to consider their thoughts and how Spurgeon might have related to their beliefs, as they pastored a few years prior to his ministry and shaped the church through their ministries. Referring to the context of the time of Spurgeon, Iain Murray assessed that “the rugged Methodist doctrines which had shaken the land a century before had not been abandoned.”⁶⁰ Methodism had flourished under the leadership of Wesley, who preached that “the sum” of the doctrine of predestination is found in the foreknowledge of God, a far different view than that of the Calvinistic persuasion, which distinguishes predestination is based on the will of God.⁶¹ The context of the period Spurgeon served was shaped by this kind of influence and direction of theological teaching.

⁵⁹ Wesley, John. *The Works of John Wesley: Predestination Calmly Considered*. Third Edition. Vol. 10. Letters, Essays, Dialogs, Addresses. (Rio, WI: Ages Software, 2000), 239.

⁶⁰ Murray, Iain Hamish. *The Forgotten Spurgeon*. (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), 22.

⁶¹ Wesley, John. “On Predestination.” Sermon. (Rio, WI. Ages Software, 2000), 248.

One final Puritan theologian worthy of consideration is Jonathan Edwards, an American, who greatly influenced John Piper. The view of Edwards on election is interesting because he wrestled through the supralapsarian vs. infralapsarian debate with purpose.⁶² Edwards concluded in *Miscellanies* 1245 that election, the work God did, “determined there should be a created body for the special communications of his goodness.”⁶³ In summary, the view of election held by Edwards points to a three part work of God in election: first, election is of Jesus Christ; second, election is of the body called the church; third, election is of individuals that comprise the body. The interpretation of Edwards on election is a kind of forerunner to the views of Karl Barth.⁶⁴

Barth was a Reformed theologian who departed from the traditional Reformed perspective in his view of predestination. He approached the topic and maintained the view that Christ is the center of the work of the God in salvation and traced the view of election through Jesus himself. In other words, Barth believed election focuses on Jesus Christ, not the salvation of the individual. For Barth, this meant that in the election of Jesus Christ all of humanity has been chosen. Douglas Sharp drew the following conclusion about the theology of Barth, “Barth’s understanding of the individual follows from his view of Jesus Christ and his election, and this means that the individual as a human being in time and space is quite simply human being

⁶² Holmes, Stephen, R. *God of Grace and God of Glory: An Account of the Theology of Jonathan Edwards*. (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 2000), 126-41.

⁶³ Edwards, Jonathan. “Search WJE Online | The Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University.” <http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUVY2dpLWJpbj9uZXdwaGlsby9nZXRvYmplY3QucGw/Yy4yMjoyOjkyLndqZW8=>.

⁶⁴ Holmes, Stephen, R. *God of Grace and God of Glory: An Account of the Theology of Jonathan Edwards*. (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 2000), 133.

elected by God.”⁶⁵ This does not mean that Barth believed in universal salvation. He carefully navigated the distinction by concluding that not all elect live as if they were elect. G.C. Berkouwer noted, that for Barth, the doctrine of election in Jesus Christ is “the most concrete reality” of theology that can be “preached and apprehended.”⁶⁶ Though Barth elevated the doctrine and its importance for preaching, his view must be explored thoroughly as it stands in distinction to that of Spurgeon and Piper. Determining which position is biblically accurate will determine how to preach this doctrine so as to encourage believers and the church in biblical health towards evangelism and missions.

The modern debate on Arminianism vs. Calvinism continues to rage on in the twenty-first-century. There are scholars and pastors who teach and preach on these doctrinal issues with regularity. Attention has recently escalated by celebrating the five-hundred-year anniversary of Martin Luther nailing his ninety-five theses to the door of Wittenburg. In 2017 Matthew Barrett introduced and edited a series of articles on Reformation doctrine composed by twenty authors from a variety of backgrounds⁶⁷. In the work, Cornelius P. Venema identified the ongoing debate about the nature of doctrine of predestination. He acknowledged that predestination is rooted in monergism attributing God as the “effective cause” of conversion; and contrasted to synergism,

⁶⁵ Sharp, Douglas R. *The Hermeneutics of Election: The Significance of the Doctrine in Barth's Church Dogmatics*. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America Inc., 1990), 83.

⁶⁶ Berkouwer, G.C. *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956). 93.

⁶⁷ Barrett, Matthew. *Reformation Theology: A Systematic Summary*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017).

which identifies that the “divine and human wills cooperate in the believer’s response to the gospel.”⁶⁸

Currently there are a significant number of books being written on the topic of election and predestination. Often these books occur in tandem as publishers encourage representatives from each side of the debate to present their views and respond to their opponents. Two such works were published by InterVarsity Press in 2004. The titles of the works are *Why I Am Not a Calvinist* and *Why I am Not an Arminian*.⁶⁹ Another collection was published by Zondervan in 2011. Michael Horton wrote *For Calvinism* and Roger Olson wrote *Against Calvinism*. Horton concluded that “it is impossible to read the Bible without recognizing God’s freedom to choose some and not others.”⁷⁰ Olson completed his chapter on election by referencing John Wesley and concluded that prevenient grace restores the freedom of the will of man. Olson then remarked that the ability of man to work with God for salvation is a result of God “implanting enabling grace” in the heart of man.⁷¹ He then identified the traditional Arminian understanding of election and stated election is “God’s foreknowledge of who will receive this grace unto salvation.”⁷²

⁶⁸ Venema, Cornelius P., “Predestination and Election.” In *Reformation Theology: A Systematic Summary*. Edited by Matthew Barrett. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 246.

⁶⁹ Walls, Jerry L., and Joseph Dongell. *Why I Am Not a Calvinist*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

Peterson, Robert A, and Michael D Williams. *Why I Am Not an Arminian*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

⁷⁰ Horton, Michael. *For Calvinism*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 54.

⁷¹ Olson, Roger E. *Against Calvinism*. Accordance electronic ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

⁷² Ibid.

John Frame offered a different explanation regarding the free will of man and its relationship to the Sovereignty of God. He referred to Proverbs 16:9, “The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps (Proverbs 16:9 ESV)” and then concluded that “God controls our free decisions and attitudes.”⁷³ He indicated that Arminian theology identifies that the choice of man is the cause of the choice of God, which is then the effect.⁷⁴ He concluded that the use of foreknowledge in biblical language “the verb *know* has a noun, rather than a fact-clause as its object,” which indicates that the relationship is personal not informational.⁷⁵ In other words, *knowing* is about knowing someone not knowing that something is. Frame identified that election must be an unconditional work of God and a “faithful response to the gift of his grace.”⁷⁶

Pastors and Theologians

The value of bringing the sermons and additional works of Spurgeon and Piper into the Arminianism vs. Calvinism debate is the final goal of this work. The methodology of research will consist of comparing sermons of Spurgeon and Piper by text and topic, while including evaluations of their other works that meaningfully engage the topics of election and predestination. The work will utilize the extensive indexes of their sermons by topic and text which make this a reasonable tool in the research process. The following pages address several sermons or other works as examples of what can be gathered.

⁷³ Frame, John M. *The Doctrine of God: A Theology of Lordship*. (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2002), 63.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 72.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 328.

Piper stated, “The doctrine of election has a strong tendency to make a church rigorous about the truth and about the Scriptures, and so keep it from drifting into doctrinal indifference and conformity to culture.”⁷⁷ In a similar fashion Spurgeon emphasized the importance of teaching the whole counsel of the Scriptures. He identified that both Arminians and Calvinists follow their respective systems instead of believing all that is taught in the Word of God.⁷⁸ He went on to describe two undeniable truths in Scripture, that “God has a people whom he has chosen for himself” and simultaneously Christ is presented freely to mankind and “that the invitations and exhortations of the gospel are honest and true invitations.”⁷⁹

Spurgeon and Piper both addressed Deuteronomy 10:14-16, which addresses the will of God in choosing Israel because of his love. Piper stated that the love of God is expressed by “God's choice of individuals to believe and become part of the redeemed people of God,” thus relating God's choosing of Israel to the movement of God in the time of the New Testament as the doctrine of election.⁸⁰ Spurgeon also acknowledged that the verses teach that “God has chosen to himself a people whom no man can number, out of the children of Adam.”⁸¹

⁷⁷ Piper, John. “Pastoral Thoughts on the Doctrine of Election.” Accordance electronic ed, (November 20, 2003).

⁷⁸ .” Spurgeon, Charles, H. “Election and.” March 11, 1860. No. 303. (Rio, WI. Ages Software, 2000), 238. “The Arminian trembles to go an inch beyond Arminius or Wesley, and many a Calvinist refers to John Gill or John Calvin, as any ultimate authority. It is time that the systems were broken up, and that there was sufficient grace in all our hearts to believe everything taught in God's Word, whether it was taught by either of these men or not.”

⁷⁹ Ibid. 239.

⁸⁰ Piper, John. “The Pleasure of God in Election,” Accordance electronic ed. (Minneapolis, MN, February 22, 1987).

⁸¹ Spurgeon, Charles, H. “Election and Holiness,” No. 303. March 11, 1860. (Rio, WI. Ages Software, 2000), 240.

One of the most common passages that Arminians reference is found in John 6. Spurgeon and Piper both preached on this passage and took a Calvinistic perspective in their interpretation. Spurgeon began the message by emphasizing that Christ's "Father gave him a certain number to be the reward of his soul travail, and he will have every one of them."⁸² From that thought Spurgeon launched into teaching on the importance of people coming to Christ, an evangelistic message in which he sought to remove any excuse that might prevent his hearers coming to Christ for salvation. He identified a question for them to ask themselves, "Do I belong to that number?" with a view of helping his hearers discover whether they belong to the 'all'."⁸³

Similarly, Piper identified the two perspectives that are addressed in the passage in John 6. First, he addressed the perspective from side of man, identifying human responsibility in salvation. Second, he addressed ideas from the side of God and his sovereign action taken "to accomplish his saving purposes."⁸⁴ He concluded that it is the purpose of God to save some by giving eternal life through Jesus and that purpose never fails. Like Spurgeon, Piper also asked a key question to emphasize the evangelistic nature of the passage, "How can I know if I am among the chosen ones?"⁸⁵ He then answered based on John 6:35 that if one comes hungry for Jesus as the bread of life and one longs to be satisfied by Jesus the living water "they have been given to the Son."⁸⁶

⁸² Spurgeon, Charles, H. "All Comers to Christ Welcomed." Metropolitan Tabernacle, November 17, 1889. (Rio, WI. Ages Software, 2000).

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Piper, John. "Behold, Believe, Be Raised." Accordance electronic ed. (Minneapolis, MN, November 22, 2009).

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Piper, John. "Behold, Believe, Be Raised." Accordance electronic ed. (Minneapolis, MN, November 22, 2009).

In a sermon on Psalm 45 Spurgeon taught on the covenant of God to man secured through Jesus Christ. In the sermon he addressed his views on covenant theology, and so doing identified his views on election. He imagined a dialogue between God the Father and Jesus the Son and conveyed the idea that no one can count the number of those who the Father has elected in Christ. He also said, “all for who thou shalt atone shall infallibly be delivered from death.”⁸⁷ The importance of the doctrine of election was not a moot point for Spurgeon, instead he often addressed the importance of the Christian making their calling and election sure. He also encouraged the believer to identify the evidences of their election through the fruitfulness of their life as a believer.⁸⁸

By taking the collective views of Spurgeon into consideration, a systematic understanding can be determined. Knowing that he strongly committed himself to a Calvinistic system, there are undeniable convictions that influenced his teaching communicated in sermons and other writings. All the while, Spurgeon intended to encourage the church to be evangelistic. He taught his students at the Pastors College to “work the church into a fine missionary condition.”⁸⁹ It is not difficult to conclude that as a Calvinist, Spurgeon emphasized the essential need for Christians to be evangelistic.

Piper was focused similarly, as he called the church to missionary action. He wrote, “God’s will for all people to be saved is not at odds with the sovereignty of his grace in

⁸⁷ Spurgeon, Charles, H. “The Gracious Lips of Jesus.” New Park Street Chapel, 1907. (Rio, WI. Ages Software, 2000), 132.

⁸⁸ Nettles, Tom. *Living by Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Theology of Charles Haddon Spurgeon.* (Scotland, United Kingdom: Christian Focus Publications, Ltd, 2015), 221.

⁸⁹ Spurgeon, Charles, H. “On Conversion As Our Aim.” Lectures to My Students. Volume 3. Lecture 10. (Rio, WI. Ages Software, 2000).

election.”⁹⁰ The previous statement doesn’t mean that Piper is a universalist for he later adds clarity to his statement:

With the fullness and the majesty of the achievement of Jesus on the cross as the basis, we now offer him and all that he has achieved for his elect to everyone on earth. Christ invites everyone to come. And everyone who comes is saved. Everyone who received Christ has been chosen from the foundation of the world and is an heir of an infinite inheritance.⁹¹

Conclusion

It has been recognized that Spurgeon contributed a unique perspective on the matter of election because he took the problems of election and “made election into practical, evangelical call.”⁹² Spurgeon identified election as a unique act of God in order to elevate the majesty of God while emphasizing the power and authority of God. It is clear, that in his preaching, Spurgeon insisted that the power and authority of God are displayed uniquely in the doctrine of election and predestination. He did not hesitate to preach, teach, or write and was an enthusiastic witness to all people, as he encouraged them to come to Jesus as their savior.

The relevancy of the preaching and teaching of Spurgeon on the doctrines of predestination and election remains useful and offers insight for pastors and the church. Piper offers similar insight and perspectives that will enlighten and enliven the debate from a pastoral practice and theological perspective. In 1966 Iain Murray stated the following about Spurgeon and his relevancy:

In exploring the reasons for Spurgeon’s stand against Arminianism we are therefore not simply excavating some old battlefield of theological antiquities; the fact that the matter

⁹⁰ Piper, John. *Does God Desire All to Be Saved?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013) 53.

⁹¹ Ibid. 54.

⁹² Rountree III, J. Clarke. “Charles Haddon Spurgeon’s Calvinist Rhetoric of Election: Consulting an Elect.” *Journal of Communication & Religion* 17, no. 2 (September 1994): 33. 35.

is still so controversial proves that it is very relevant to the current situation in the churches.⁹³

Spurgeon and Piper also offer helpful insights about the Scriptures that encourage evangelism and mission efforts in the church. The current cultural context of the church reveals that the church is in need of this same emphasis. By evaluating the sermons and other writings of Spurgeon and Piper pastors can learn and model the same kinds of emphases to encourage their church, no matter where the pastor falls in the Arminianism vs. Calvinism debate.

In fact, when considering the doctrinal matters in Arminianism vs. Calvinism debate, it is essential that Christians maintain attitudes of humility while encouraging one another in the affirmation of the importance of humanity's need for salvation and evangelizing the lost. It is also important to acknowledge that neither Arminianism or Calvinism is heretical. Heresy is best understood as a system of faith that invalidates Jesus as the only Savior or the belief that salvation is found in any way other than by the grace of God extended through Jesus Christ and received through faith.

Spurgeon modeled an attitude of peace and cooperation toward his Arminian friends when it came to matters of ministry together, note his statement:

I believe, most firmly, in the doctrines commonly called Calvinistic, and I hold them to be very fraught with comfort to God's people; but if any man shall say that the preaching of these is the whole of the preaching of the gospel, I am at issue with him. Brethren, you may preach those doctrines as long as you like, and yet fail to preach the gospel; and I will go further, and affirm that some who have even denied those truths, to our great grief, have nevertheless been gospel preachers for all that, and God has saved souls by their ministry.⁹⁴

⁹³ Murray, Iain Hamish. *The Forgotten Spurgeon*. (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), 55.

⁹⁴ Spurgeon, Charles, H. "The Great Mystery of Godliness." No. 786. Vol. 13. Metropolitan Tabernacle, December 22, 1867. (Rio, WI. Ages Software, 2000), 879.

In the previous statement, Spurgeon modeled a godly attitude toward pastors who stood on the opposite side of his theological system. He conveyed the importance of his own doctrinal views and their influence in his preaching, but he also maintained the importance of sharing the gospel. Though he was in the midst of the debate, he embraced his brothers in Christ as fellow ploughman in the work. For the pastor who is in the modern debate pastors Spurgeon is a great example of the perspective and attitude of humility that ought to be exemplified when serving together to further the kingdom work of Jesus Christ.

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