

THEOLOGY COLORING BOOK

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These articles are supposed to be a review of K. C. Moser's book, *The Way of Salvation*—appropriate because of current use of the book to bolster some recent trends toward Calvinistic concepts. But such a review, to be of true value, must be based on something more than labels. Brother Moser would be considered a poor Calvinist, in the classic sense of the word; yet there are passages that seem tinted in that direction. He often uses the classic terminology of Calvinism. Example: "God...takes the initiative in the redemption of man. "Indeed, he must; for man could not start. Here are mysteries too deep for man" (p. 25). Or, "God saves man by saving him" (p. 41). Or, "Indeed, it seems to be difficult even at the present time for many to grasp the idea of a righteousness, that, does not depend upon human effort" (p. 115). If one searches he many find the author hedges against the Calvinistic use of such statements; but not enough to remove the stain. G. C. Brewer understood him to teach imputed righteousness. In a 1933 review (*Gospel Advocate*) he said,

"He shows the difference in the righteousness which is of the law—a righteousness achieved by doing things required by the law—and the righteousness revealed in the gospel, which is the righteousness of God—not our own—imputed to us because of our faith in Christ."

I believe some gospel preachers, untrained in "theological" systems, may have imbibed erroneous concepts from commentaries and current literature, and unwittingly allowed their conclusions to be falsely colored. Others, in a commendable desire to counter legalistic abuses in our thinking, may have developed abused concepts of grace and faith. Surely there are few, if any, who have so accepted the logical consequences of their error that they should be firmly labeled Calvinists. But all of this does mean we should endeavor to better understand theological systems and their effect upon our generation. This is especially true of Calvinism, and the neo-Calvinism of our day.

When John Calvin published his *Christian Institutes* (1536) he gave the world a systematized and organized version of concepts long extant. One can obtain and read the *Institutes* today, but the more practical course in our busy world is to read *The Plan of Salvation*, by Benjamin B. Warfield; Eerdmans Publ. Co., Grand Rapids. It is a paperback, relatively easy to digest. Warfield regards as truth (and Calvinistic): (1) man's guilt, corruption and total inability, as a result of Adam's fall which God permitted (some say "decreed"); (2) election of some individuals to life in Christ; (3) gift of Christ to redeem his elect (with, a "play" on 'eschatological universalism'); (4) gift of the Holy Spirit to save the redeemed; (5) sanctification of all the redeemed and regenerated. This is the classic TULIP of Calvinism: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irrresistible grace, and Preservation of the elect. It will become apparent that true Calvinism denies the "free will" of man, and makes both man's fall and his

salvation wholly the result of God's decrees. Man can do nothing to effect his eternal destiny; even "faith" is not his work, but must be given him by God.

The "tricky" part of this is that the points are closely related, so that if one accepts "*depravity*" he may find himself pushed into direct operation of the Holy Spirit to remove depravity; or, if one accepts some immediate operation of the Holy Spirit (including the personal indwelling) he may find himself with altered views on preservation. Do not underestimate the power of logical consequence—by which this close-knit system can "color" your conclusions. So great was the influence of Calvinistic theology on the Reformation period that one of the basic concepts of the system has become synonymous with "orthodoxy" in a large segment of historic Christendom. If someone should ask, "Are you and the church of which you are a member, "evangelical"? many would answer, "Yes," thinking (logically enough) that this meant you believed in preaching the gospel. But in classic theology this word designates "the necessity of spiritual renovation, and participation in the experience of redemption through faith." Expanded, this means man's depravity must be removed by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon him. Faith is an "experience"—something which God gives to man. (The "evangelical" interpretation of Eph. 2:8 is that "faith" [not salvation] is the "*gift of God*.") The classic evangelical is not content to say God must "take the initiative" in providing the universal means of salvation (Christ and his message). He believes God must directly effect the redemption and preservation of individuals.

In an oddly ironic way this great "God only" system actually generates a form of subjectivism—a "within man" standard. The individual is told he must be directed by the scriptures, but they are "spiritually discerned". He has an "experience" of grace, and the Holy Spirit "personally indwells" him. In the final analysis emotions and "feelings" are his forte—his "green light" and "still small voice" take the place of objective and factual considerations of God's word. We believe Calvinism is the ultra-red paint pot of our *Theological Coloring Book*. Some facets of revived Calvinism (or its tints) which have appeared among members of the church are: (1) a concept of "depravity" that blames "nature" rather than the individual; (2) a "grace" that saves man irrespective of his response; (3) righteousness imputed, via Christ's perfect LIFE, rather than sins forgiven (*not* imputed), because of the DEATH of Christ; (4) preservation, via the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit and His immediate influence. Of course many hold to some of these concepts without ever having directly relating them to the Calvinistic system—all the more reason to beware of the trend.

Warfield thinks Calvinism has an opposite, the ultra-violet paint pot, in Pelagianism. Pelagius (ca. 360-420 A.D.) was a British monk who sought to counter the Augustinian doctrine of total depravity and its consequent bondage of the will of man. His favorite maxim was, "If I ought, I can." He apparently ascribed to the unassisted human will, power to accept and use the proffered salvation of Christ, maintaining that it is the human will which takes the initiative. But the Roman church maintained that it is the

divine will that takes the initiative by renewing and enabling the human will to accept and use the aid of grace offered. (See *Encyclopedia Britannica*.) Warfield defines Pelagianism as: (1) gift of free will by virtue of which each may do all that is required of him; (2) gift of the law and gospel to illuminate the way and persuade men to walk in it; (3) gift of Christ to expiate past sin and set a good example; (4) acceptance of all who walk in the right way; (5) continuance in right-doing by voluntary effort. The Calvin-inclined fellows insist that “doing” is legalism, and that “doers” are trying to lift themselves by their own bootstraps; are denying “grace”. They see Pelagian purple in every statement on the necessity of obedience. But the “doers” develop the pink-eye, and see Calvinistic red in every sermon on “grace”. The “systems” are pushing us around. Personally, I believe TRUTH is its own color, consistent and complete; but I am concerned when I feel some have allowed “systems” to discolor the word of God.

In Moser’s book, *The Way of Salvation*, the author wishes to stress justification by faith (a scriptural doctrine). What color do you see in the following? From page 37: “Works might be defined as an effort on man’s part to save himself. They naturally exclude a Savior.” Page 38: “Faith looks to the blood of Christ, a thing of merit. Works look to nothing.” (How about Christ as Lord?) Page 39: “Some think the reward is still of grace, though conditioned upon works, if the reward exceeds in value of work done. It is forgotten that grace and works are naturally opposed, however weakened works may be.” (He is strong on “natural” conclusions—using the expression frequently. I believe he would have done better to have used “scriptural” with citations.) Later, when the author seeks to explain New Testament “law” he writes:

“Now, Christianity is a law in the sense of imposing upon man obligations. These obligations, however, can be met; and hence man is not left in bondage as he was under the law of Moses. Simple law, such as that of Moses, enslaved because the ‘law of sin’ in man is left unconquered. But grace crucifies this ‘old man,’ and hence makes it possible for its obligations to be met...” (p. 74).

How does grace do it? “The Holy Spirit is given the child of God for the purpose of crucifying lust and thus enabling man to live righteously” (p. 71). You will notice that brother Moser puts this work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the saint, to enable him to live the Christian life—not as God’s gift to the alien, to enable him to believe and obey the gospel. But if “obligations must be met” in order to reach heaven, he has escaped neither the odium of “works” nor the error of immediate operation of the Holy Spirit. The author meets himself coming back because he has embraced some aspects of a system, and does not want to swallow it all. He is gagging on the “hook”.

And that is exactly why I agreed to write this series. I believe brethren of our day are getting into the same conflict. Some have painted with red, some with purple; and yet, despite some rather “wild” statements in both colors, I doubt that many—if any—want to go the whole way. Free will and the correlative subject of depravity are fundamentals that are yet hidden beneath the surface tempests our brethren are stirring.

We will not deal with them in much depth here. But we must present scriptural studies on faith and works, as they are related to salvation by grace. “Imputed righteousness” and the operation of the Holy Spirit demand attention. We will continue to refer to Moser’s *The Way of Salvation* but our greater interest will be in making an objective study of the scriptures on the subjects raised by the book. God forbid that we should try to “paint over” one another’s work with our own private brand of theology.

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