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Recovering Reformation Theology

Rejecting Synergism and Returning to Monergism

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“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8, 9)

A key idea in the contemporary evangelical movement is that revival can be engineered. The Purpose Driven Web site says, “Peter Drucker called him [Warren] ‘the inventor of perpetual revival’ and Forbes magazine has written, ‘If Warren’s church was a business it would be compared with Dell, Google or Starbucks.’”¹ The Purpose Driven movement can cite this business management guru approvingly only because they have a faulty theology of human ability. For example, Rick Warren says, “It is my deep conviction that anybody can be won to Christ if you discover the key to his or her heart. . . . It may take some time to identify it. But the most likely place to start is with the person’s felt needs.”² If this were true one could use modern marketing principles to sell people on their need for Christian religion and convince them to convert in order to find satisfaction of their felt needs. But it is not true.

Furthermore, it might surprise many people that this idea is not new. Charles Finney first proposed it one hundred fifty years ago. Finney wrote, “A revival is not a miracle according to another definition of the term ‘miracle’ — something above the powers of nature. There is nothing in religion beyond the ordinary powers of nature. It consists entirely in the right exercise of the powers of nature. It is just that, and nothing else.”³ Finney wrote more: “A revival is not a miracle, nor dependent on a miracle, in any sense. It is a purely philosophical

result of the right use of the constituted means — as much so as any other effect produced by the application of means.”⁴ Finney’s position that there is some innate power in man that can be motivated by some discoverable process makes an engineered revival plausible.

So how does one create a revival by the right use of means? Finney tells us: “There must be excitement sufficient to wake up the dormant moral powers, and roll back the tide of degradation and sin.”⁵ Finney and Rick Warren claim that revival can be engineered by human efforts. This belief is grounded on the idea of human ability. It is plausible to them only because Finney and Warren believe that there is some principle, be it a “dormant moral power” or “felt need,” that can be excited into action to cause people to become Christians and live godly lives. Neither Finney nor Warren would deny that the Holy Spirit’s work is necessary. But in their theology, the Holy Spirit is always everywhere doing His part. It becomes our business to find the key to unlock something in sinners to get them to do their part.

This theological perspective is fully at odds with the doctrines of the Reformation. The Reformers taught human inability and bondage to sin. They taught monergism (that salvation is fully an act of God) not synergism (that salvation is a cooperative effort between man and God). They taught that only a sovereign work of grace

(grace alone) brought salvation. The ideas of Finney and Warren suggest that man has some innate principle or ability that could be stirred up by the revivalist with the right method, and thus anyone could be saved. In this article we will discuss this belief system and suggest a return to the doctrines of the Reformation.

SYNERGISM

The technical name of this theology is “synergism.” Those who teach synergism believe that salvation is a cooperative effort between God and man. In my last article I discussed this and cited the Roman Catholic Council of Trent which teaches synergism. Here is another citation of Trent from the Canons on Justification: “If any one shall affirm, that man’s freewill, moved and excited by God, does not, by consenting, cooperate with God, the mover and exciter, so as to prepare and dispose itself for the attainment of justification; if moreover, anyone shall say, that the human will cannot refuse complying, if it pleases, but that it is inactive, and merely passive; let such an one be accursed.”⁶ This canon was a direct attack on Luther’s doctrine espoused in *The Bondage of the Will*.

Most people, based on their own perceptions, assume synergism to be true. They assume that though God made it possible for people to be saved, it was something in them, apart from any special work of grace, that caused them to “accept Christ” as they say. That’s what it seems like. I understand this because from our perspective we do accept Christ. When I was converted in 1971, I had to answer to my co-workers who heard me railing against Christianity and blaspheming God the night before. The next day I was converted. When I went back to work they noticed that something appeared different about me; but no one dared ask. Finally at the end of our shift, one of them asked what had happened. I

answered, “I accepted Christ,” which shocked them. What I did not realize was that though it may have seemed that way, what really happened was Christ accepted me by providing forgiveness of my sins through His blood and apprehending me on the scene of history through the gospel.

We must gain our theology from the Bible, not from our interpretations of our own experience. The Bible does not teach synergism, but that salvation is an act of God: “*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God*” (Ephesians 2:8). Paul also wrote, “*But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption*” (1Corinthians 1:30).⁷ In both of these passages, the contexts contain warnings against boasting (1Corinthians 1:29, 31; Ephesians 2:9). If being saved were the result of something we did through some innate ability that all humans have, then these passages would make no sense.

Let us consider the following analogy to illustrate synergism. Developers purchase some undeveloped land to create a new housing subdivision. They hire contractors to build houses on the land. The contractors hire electricians to wire each house for electricity. The power company is hired to bring electric power to the subdivision and hook each house up to the power. The houses are sold and occupied. If one drove through the subdivision at 11:30 p.m., and noticed that the lights were on in some houses but not others, who would they consider responsible for that fact? Since every house was equally wired with power and occupied by a person capable of turning on a switch, the only reason the lights would be on in some houses but not others is that in some cases the occupants turned them on. The occupants are the responsible parties.

We could imagine many other analogies for synergism, but they all lead to the same conclusion. Whether it’s called the “prevenient inspiration of the Holy Spirit” as it is in Trent, or something else, synergists claim that God has already made it possible for every person

to be saved. God has done his part, like the power company that wired the houses. Turning on the switch is up to the individual. The person with the lit house may say, “Thank God for the power,” but they were ones who decided to turn it on. If it is on for them while their neighbors sit in the dark, the difference is only attributable to human actions, not to anything the power company did.

Likewise, the synergist must admit that the reason he or she is saved and someone else is not is found only in themselves, not in God. Why? Because in their system, (a cooperative effort between God and man), God ALWAYS continually does His part. Some synergists claim that fairness requires that God MUST do everything He can to save everyone. Since they assume this as an *a priori* belief, they will not accept any Biblical evidence to the contrary. But a logical corollary to their belief is that if God is indeed always doing everything He can to save everyone, and yet some are saved and some are not, then the reason some are saved has to be found in them, not God.

Synergists may say that salvation is 99 percent from God and 1 percent from man, but the 1 percent part that is man’s doing determines who is saved and who is not 100 percent of the time. Back to the analogy—God wires the entire human race to the Holy Spirit power source and humans either turn on the spiritual light through a free will choice, or they do not. That is the essence of a synergistic system of salvation. This is what most of the evangelical world believes today. It is, however, a rejection of Reformation doctrine including the *solus* that we will discuss later in this article.

SYNERGISM AND PREVENIENT GRACE

The reason Roman Catholicism, and other synergistic theologies teach prevenient grace is to avoid Pelagianism (a system of doctrine that denies that Adam’s sin nature is passed down to His descendents). The Bible has so much material on universal human sinfulness, that teaching human ability would embarrass most people who claim to

believe the Bible (though it did not seem to bother Finney). To avoid teaching that sinful man is fully able to come to God without a work of grace, the doctrine of prevenient grace was introduced. “Prevenient” comes from the old English term “prevent” that meant “go before.”⁸ The idea is that God universally sends prevenient grace to all humans that undoes the sin nature just enough to make it possible for them to choose to believe the gospel. After discussing the fact of spiritual inability as taught in the Bible, Millard Erickson discusses prevenient grace as a proposed solution:

It is here that many Arminians, recognizing human inability as taught in Scripture, introduce the concept of prevenient grace, which is believed to have a universal effect nullifying the noetic results of sin [how thinking is affected], thus making belief possible. The problem is that there is no clear and adequate basis in Scripture for this concept of universal enablement. The theory, appealing though it is in many ways, simply is not taught explicitly in the Bible.⁹

This does not mean proponents of the concept do not look for proof texts. The most common one proposed is: “*There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man*” (John 1:9) Those who teach prevenient grace often prefer the King James translation: “*That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.*” As some interpret this, Christ gives light to everyone at their birth. The Greek could be translated as Christ coming into the world or every man coming into the world. But in the context of John 1, it is Christ who is coming into the world in the Incarnation that is central.¹⁰ Likewise, the context of John is not teaching that Christ enlightens every person at their birth. John 3:19 says this: “*And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil.*” Since Jesus is the light

that comes into the world, John 1:9 should be translated and interpreted accordingly. And, if Jesus actually enlightened every person at their birth, how is it that they love darkness? A much better interpretation is that Jesus, in His Incarnation, brought God's light into the dark world. The world is aware of this light through the fact that God displayed His saving purposes publicly. But in its sinfulness, the world preferred darkness. John 1:9 does not teach prevenient grace.

Thomas Schreiner also disagrees with the interpretation of John 1:9 that claims it teaches prevenient grace: "The light that enlightens every person does not entail bestowment of grace, nor does it refer to the inward illumination of the heart by the Spirit of God. Rather, the light exposes and reveals the moral and spiritual state of one's heart. . . . John 1:9 is not, therefore, suggesting that through Christ's coming each person is given the ability to choose salvation."¹¹ Schreiner provides a good summary of various ways the passage has been interpreted and also discusses other passages sometimes used to support prevenient grace. His conclusion is that the concept of prevenient grace cannot be justified by Biblical exegesis. Schreiner is surprised at how little exegetical effort to justify it has been put forth by people who claim to believe this doctrine.¹²

The alternative to synergism and prevenient grace is monergism and efficacious grace. God effectively saves, by His power alone, all those who He has elected for salvation. Rather than believing that God is trying His best to save every individual but failing most of the time, the Reformation doctrine is that God's purposes do not fail. Since salvation depends on God alone, through Christ alone, by faith alone, through grace alone, it ultimately gives all glory to God alone. These beliefs are found by holding Scripture alone to be God's authoritative revelation. These are the *solus* (Latin for "alone") of the Reformation.

CONSEQUENCES OF SYNERGISM

Before examining and defending the

solus of the Reformation, I want to describe some of the negative consequences (perhaps unintended) that attend the rejection of Reformation doctrine in favor of synergism. No matter how badly synergists¹³ want to portray their doctrine as Biblical, their attempt to do so fails on some key points. The other problem is this: synergism creates a temptation to compromise.

The Doctrine of Election is Compromised

Synergists who affirm the authority of Scripture have to find a way to explain the many Scripture passages on election. It is beyond the scope of this article to deal with their many attempts and refute each of them.¹⁴ But every one of the synergistic explanations come to the same conclusion as illustrated with my power company and light switch analogy—man, not God, determines who the elect are.

In some versions of synergism, man elects himself through a free will choice, and may unelect himself by subsequent free will choices. Most synergists do not say it exactly like that because it sounds crass, but this is what they believe. To be fair, there are synergists who affirm the security of the believer, though they must ignore the fact that if we are secure in Christ, it must be through His doing and not ours that we have the security of our salvation. If we are secure in our salvation and it is also true that apostates will be damned, then in some sense God must be working to keep all of His elect from falling into apostasy. The free will doctrine that we discussed in the last issue of CIC cannot account for the security of the believer, but the Reformed doctrine of grace alone can. God keeps by His power and grace all whom He saves by His power and grace because salvation from beginning to end is of God alone.

The Authority of Scripture is Compromised

Though Protestant synergists affirm the authority of Scripture, they nevertheless diminish it in the following way: when the Bible says, "*But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from*

the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth" (2Thessalonians 2:13), they say it really means something else. They do the same for over forty other passages that use terms like "chosen, elect, predestined," etc.¹⁵ Synergists have to believe that when we are told that God chose us and we are His elect, the Bible really means something entirely different. It means that we are God's elect because of our free will choice in history, not His choice in eternity. Should God be charged with speaking unclearly if indeed these verses do not mean what they say? Since there are so many passages that teach election, synergists apparently are willing to give their own theological assumptions priority over Biblical teaching.

A Temptation to Change the Terms of the Gospel is Created

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, once human ability is affirmed it becomes reasonable to appeal to something already in the sinner to convince him to become Christian. Since the cross and the blood atonement are deemed foolish and offensive by sinners, according to 1Corinthians 1:18, preaching the cross will not appeal to any human ability. Rather, the cross destroys any idea of human ability. But the synergist has to find some principle in the sinner to which to appeal to motivate the sinner to make a decision to become Christian. To be fair, I have known Arminians who are committed to the preaching of the cross accurately, and God uses their message to save sinners as He said He would. But their doctrine makes it tempting not to. Many other Arminians fall into the "seeker" movement because they believe they have to have an appealing message to attract people to Christ. The doctrines of the Reformation give no logical place for the seeker movement. If salvation is monergistically from God, one might as well preach the gospel with purity and clarity, knowing God will use it to save whoever is going to be saved. He will use the message of the cross to call forth His elect out of the mass of perdition.

A Temptation To Give Glory to Man is Created

Synergist Christians want to give glory to God and mostly do not want to boast (though sometimes you would not think so given the lyrics of so many man-centered “worship” songs one hears). But their doctrine creates a temptation to boast in man because ultimately their own decision is the only reason they are saved and someone else is not. The doctrine itself does not give all glory to God no matter how sincerely motivated the synergist is to give all glory to God. James Montgomery Boice describes this situation well:

A well-taught Arminian knows that salvation is “not by works, so that no one can boast” (Eph. 2:9). But if what ultimately makes the difference between one person who is saved and another who is lost is the human ability to choose God—call it free will, faith, or whatever—then boasting is *not* excluded and *all* glory cannot honestly be given to God *alone*.¹⁶

Boice also made this point about Calvinists: “But I need to add that even Reformed believers need to recapture this true gospel, since even those who insist most strongly on the doctrines of grace cannot give God glory if they are, above all, struggling to build their own kingdoms and further their own careers as many are.”¹⁷ So it is possible to have a doctrine that does not give all glory to God as do synergists, but be personally motivated to give God the glory and it is possible to have a doctrine that does give all glory to God but personally fail to do so. But the best place to start is with sound doctrine that does give God the glory and then ask Him for grace to live that out in a practical way. Starting with bad doctrine is not the way to go.

RECOVERING THE DOCTRINES OF THE REFORMATION

The *solas* of the Reformation are an expression of theology that is fully God-centered. Monergism gives God all the

glory in salvation. It also humbles humans in that they are faced with their total inability to please God and their need for an unmerited act of God’s mercy. The same cannot be said for most modern theology.

It is undeniable that the trend in evangelicalism is to be more man-centered. Robert Schuller issued a call in the 1980’s for a reformation based on man-centered rather than God-centered theology.¹⁸ The most popular evangelical writer and pastor today, Rick Warren, presents his version of Christianity as a journey to discover one’s purpose that reads like a journey of self-discovery. It stands to reason that if we believe that salvation is a cooperative effort between God and man like Rome taught, we end up with a man-centered theology.

If salvation were in the hands of man, then the church could dispense and control salvation as Medieval Rome attempted to do. Luther and the others knew that if monergism were true and expressed through the *solas*, then the church no longer had abusive power over the people. Justification was not in the hands of ecclesiastical prelates to dispense on their terms, it was in God’s hands to dispense on His terms. The church’s job was to declare those terms through the Word. The doctrines of the Reformation taught that people must look to God, not the church, for salvation.

But the doctrines of the Reformation have been abandoned by a large part of Protestantism including evangelicalism. As I showed at the beginning of this article, this is not a new development because one of the most radical rejecters of Reformation theology was the 19th century evangelist Charles Finney. This abandonment is having a serious, negative impact on the evangelical movement.

James Montgomery Boice asserts that the *solas* of the Reformation are necessary for the church to be what God intended: “Without these five confessional statements—Scripture alone, Christ alone, grace alone, faith alone, and glory to God alone—we do not have a true church, and certainly not one that

will survive for very long.”¹⁹ These doctrines are ultimately about justification. Boice writes, “We may state the full doctrine as: Justification is the act of God by which he declares sinners to be righteous because of Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone.”²⁰ The reason for the “alone” phrases was to preserve the work of God from being added to by the traditions of the church and the work of man. Rome would affirm Scripture, faith, grace, Christ, and God’s glory as true and important. But when the Reformers added “alone,” they were cursed to hell by the anathemas of Trent. We need to get back to these doctrines.

Scripture Alone

Recovering Reformation theology must begin by returning to a full belief in the Scripture as the only authoritative revelation from God and a practice that reflects this. Nearly every evangelical church has a statement that affirms the authority and inerrancy of Scripture in its official documents. It is the domain of liberals to reject the authority of Scripture. But nevertheless the Bible mostly is not given the place it should in the practice of many churches. We say “*sola Scriptura*” and practice the Bible plus the wisdom of man.

The sales success of Rick Warren’s *The Purpose Driven Life* is evidence for this. The biggest selling book by any contemporary evangelical is an ungodly amalgamation of bad Bible translations, misused Scripture, human wisdom, and approving citations of New Agers, and other worldly writers.²¹ Many churches are changing their programs and practices in order to become Purpose Driven. This is incompatible with the doctrine of Scripture alone. Many will protest what I am saying and point to their statement of faith. But if we say we believe in Scripture alone, yet relegate the Scripture to merely one of the authorities in our public preaching, the message of the evangelical church becomes indistinguishable from the message of a liberal church that denies the inerrancy of the Bible.

Boice, who led the charge in the 1970’s to protect the doctrine of Biblical

inerrancy, says that now what is being denied is the *sufficiency* of Scripture.²² I have heard from people whose churches converted to the seeker approach. One of them sent me a tape of a sermon from that used to be a Bible based Baptist church. The entire sermon referenced no Scripture and consisted of a story about a preacher going on vacation and being stressed out. The point of the sermon was that modern, suburban Americans are under too much stress and need to slow down. My friend said that in a previous Sunday sermon there was a passage from John 10 printed in the bulletin about Jesus coming to give abundant life, but the entire sermon was from a psychologist giving a talk about having better marriages. John 10 is about coming to Christ for salvation, not having a better marriage. This church, which abandoned Bible preaching from the pulpit ten years ago, now has 8,000 people attending every Sunday morning. How exactly is giving psychological pep talks from the pulpit a reflection of a commitment to Scripture alone? It is not.

Whatever a church has in its statement of faith, if the Bible is not accurately and fully proclaimed from the pulpit, the Reformation doctrine of Scripture alone has been abandoned. If we want to see the power of the Holy Spirit change lives, we must repent and return to *sola Scriptura*. People, according to **1 Peter 1:23**, are born again through, "the living and abiding Word of God." Human wisdom has no power to save anyone.

Christ Alone

The Reformation doctrine of *solus Christus* was asserted to refute the Roman Catholic doctrine that added works of man to the work of Christ, claiming to add to the merits of Christ. As with Scripture alone, nearly every evangelical will agree with Christ alone. We know well that salvation is provided fully by Christ and is "not of works." But again, there is a great problem in practice that seriously diminishes the impact of this great doctrine.

A key part of this problem is the fail-

ure to publicly fully proclaim the person and work of Christ. We often hear, "Jesus died for your sins." This is true but so much is left unsaid. For example, most people know that a religious leader named "Jesus" existed, but they have never heard the doctrine of Christ proclaimed. They know Jesus was a religious leader who died, but so was Mohammed and others. They do not know that Jesus existed from all eternity with God and as God. They do not know the doctrine of the virgin birth. They do not know the many attributes of Christ that are unique to Him (such as He was fully human and fully God; He lived a sinless life, He was the only one to ever predict His own resurrection from the dead and actually arise on the third day as He said). Furthermore, hardly anyone knows WHY God sent His Son to die because they have no clue about the blood atonement. They also do not know that the wrath of God is directed against their sin that can only be averted through the blood atonement. So lacking these facts about the person and work of Christ, they are told, "Accept Jesus who died for your sins." This watered down practice shows a lack of respect for "Christ alone."

Again, Boice has an astute observation:

The "gospel" of our day has a lot to do with self-esteem, good mental attitudes, and worldly success. There is almost no preaching about sin, hell, judgment, or the wrath of God, even less about doctrines that center on the Lord of glory and his Cross: grace, redemption, atonement, propitiation, justification, and even faith.²³

This lack of preaching and teaching causes people to hear about Jesus but have no substantial doctrine of Christ. Furthermore the doctrine of substitutionary atonement is coming under attack even within so-called evangelicalism. This can be seen in the teachings of the Emergent Church. I debated one of their leaders and could not even get him to affirm that he believed in future,

divine judgment.²⁴ The lack of full-orbed teaching on Christ and the atonement is also evident in the previously mentioned *Purpose Driven Life*. Boice says, "Any 'gospel' that talks merely about the Christ-event, meaning the Incarnation without the Atonement, is a false gospel."²⁵

The Reformation doctrine of Christ alone is in shambles in our day. The remedy is the preaching of the cross which includes the Biblical truths about the person and work of Christ.

Grace Alone

The Reformation doctrine of *sola gratia* is pertinent to our discussion of synergism and monergism. A salvation that is a cooperative effort between God and man is not a salvation by grace *alone*. There is no logical way to argue that it is. Grace plus something man adds to it, whatever that might be, is not grace alone.

Again Boice's fabulous book explains this with utter clarity: "When the Reformers spoke about 'grace alone,' they were saying that sinners have no claim upon God, none at all; that God owes them nothing but punishment for their sins; and that, if he saves them in spite of their sins, which he does in the case of those who are being saved, it is only because it pleases him to do it and for no other reason."²⁶ He also explains how modern evangelicals undermine this doctrine: "Today, large numbers of evangelicals undermine and effectively destroy this doctrine by supposing that human beings are basically good; that God owes everyone a chance to be saved; and that, if we are saved, in the final analysis it is because of our own good decision to receive Jesus who is offered to us."²⁷

To whatever degree we put confidence in human ability, we destroy the doctrine of grace alone. Most evangelicals will at least give lip service to the other *solas*. This one, if it is explained in the sense it was taught by the Reformers, is outright rejected. The idea of the bondage of the will as taught by Luther is rejected. The idea that God owes salvation to no one is rejected.

People assert that God is morally obligated to do everything He can to save everyone. They believe that all humans have a claim upon God's mercy (i.e., that showing mercy to all, or at least trying to, is God's moral obligation). What they do not realize in their zeal, is that their ideas come from human wisdom and speculation and are not taught in the Bible. For example, God says this, "For He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion'" (**Romans 9:15**). This is grace alone and is not really that hard to understand. Many just don't like it.

God uses means by grace alone to save sinners. Boice explains, "Apart from those three gracious actions—the act of God in electing, the work of Christ in dying, and the operation of the Holy Spirit in calling—there would be no salvation for anyone. But because of those actions—because of God's sovereign grace—even the worst of blaspheming rebels may be turned from his or her folly and may find Christ."²⁸ The Holy Spirit's calling also has means—the preaching of the gospel to all. God uses the preaching of the gospel to graciously call forth His own from the world of sin and death.²⁹ God then uses His ordained means to graciously sanctify and preserve in faith all of those who are saved. All the "called" (effectively) will be glorified (see **Romans 8:29-30**).

Faith Alone

The doctrine of *sola fide* is near and dear to all evangelicals—historically. There are those today who doubt the reality of damnation and future judgment. Such persons have a much different notion of what salvation means. If salvation means finding a better life in this world, then "faith alone" does not make much sense. It doesn't take faith in Christ to find a better life in this world. Unbelievers often do that. But for those who take damnation to be real, salvation by faith alone is a glorious and cherished doctrine. This doctrine is rarely lacking in published statements of faith.

But, as with the other *solas*, this one is being compromised. Non-Catholic synergists assert that "faith alone" is a

true doctrine. But they usually deny that faith is a gift from God given to the elect. In this denial, again they depart from the teaching of the Reformation. They usually claim that everyone has the ability to believe, only some choose to exercise it and others do not. This gets us back to human ability again, which is the root cause of many theological problems.

Finney continually railed against the doctrine of inability. He took it as axiomatic that God never commands anything that a person is not fully able to do. The following statement is typical Finney: "It is this speculation about the inability of sinners to obey God, that lays the foundation for all the protracted anguish and distress, and perhaps ruin, into which so many are led."³⁰ Finney's error has infected various parts of the evangelical movement for the last 150 years.

The assumption is that if God commands us to repent and believe, this implies that we are fully able to do so. I dealt with this faulty thinking in the last issue of CIC. The universal call expresses God's moral will and is issued to all. The internal call is heard by those who do believe. This is by grace alone and through faith as **Ephesians 2:8** says. Jesus said, "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day" (**John 6:44**). The word "can" is *dunamis* in the Greek, and it is the word for power or ability. No one has the power or ability to come to Jesus unless God acts to draw (this word means "drag" not "attract") him. Further proof that "draw" does not mean "woo" as many claim is shown in the result: "I will raise him up on the last day." The synergistic doctrine holds that God has universally "drawn" everyone through prevenient grace or some universal work of the Holy Spirit. But if this is what is meant in this passage, it would be teaching universal salvation because the "drawn" ones actually come to Christ and are raised on the last day.

Since we are saved by faith alone, faith by which we come to Christ is not possible unless the Father first draws us. This is a necessary implication of **John 6:44**. Saving faith is not an innate human ability that is actualized by a free

will choice. It is the gift of God.

Faith is also more than mere mental assent to facts. Some synergists who want to preserve the doctrine of faith alone and also teach human ability, do so by truncating the meaning of faith. Faith as understood by Reformation doctrine contained three elements: *notitia* (knowledge of the truth), *assensus* (assent to and belief in the truth), and *fiducia* (trust and commitment).³¹ By asserting that believing the facts about Jesus and nothing more is all that is needed for salvation, some make faith easily accessible to all (human ability).³² We need to recover the Reformation description of faith and the doctrine of faith alone as understood by the Reformers.

Glory to God Alone

The fifth *sola* of the Reformation is *soli Deo gloria*, which affirms that everything, including the work of God in salvation, is for His glory alone. Earlier in this article I discussed how synergism mitigates against God receiving all the glory. In his commentary on Isaiah 48:11, Luther discusses what he calls "the battle between God and the self-righteous concerning glory." Luther called those who think that salvation is found through anything but grace "robbers" because they robbed God of His rightful glory. Here is what Luther wrote:

The self-righteous man thinks that God will give him rewards for fasting and labor. He thinks that without these God will give him nothing. He thinks precisely that God is someone who will save him through his works, not for the sake of free grace. To this fiction, "God will save me through my works," he attributes salvation. This is the most persistent struggle and battle of the world against God. No one wants to rely on God's glory alone and repudiate all his own merits.³³

Reformation doctrine indeed gives all glory to God. The first four *solas* lead logically and necessarily to the fifth.

When God though Christ alone and by grace alone saves sinners through faith alone as taught in Scripture alone, God alone receives the glory. This is where we must stand with Luther and the other reformers. Our modern movement is severely lacking in this regard.

CONCLUSION

We began this article discussing engineered revivals based on stirring up some innate ability in sinners by man-made means. Boice comments on this tendency in his chapter on Glory to God alone: "Spiritual work must be accomplished through God's Spirit. So it is not you or I who stir up a revival, build a church, or convert even a single soul. Rather, it is as we are blessed in the work by God that God by the power of his Holy Spirit converts and sanctifies those he chooses to call to faith."³⁴ No one who believed what Boice wrote would accept the designation, "inventor of perpetual revival." This gives glory to man, not God.

There likely are complex reasons that the contemporary evangelical movement has for the most part left behind Reformation theology. The one that seems most apparent is the success of certain people in building huge churches and movements through man-centered theology and man-made techniques. We can build institutions and movements through human effort, but the true church of Jesus Christ is built by God's work through Christ. It is built as sinners are saved. Whether Christians believe Reformation doctrine or not, if they are truly regenerate, they are so because God alone saved them and He did so monergistically. How much better it would be for the church and the preaching of the gospel if we would return to the *solas* of the Reformation and give God all of the glory.

END NOTES

1. http://www.purposedriven.com/en-US/AboutUs/WhatIsPD/PD_Articles/New+York+Times+Best+Seller.htm
2. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) 219.
3. Charles Finney, *Lectures on Revival*, Lecture 1; from Books For The Ages,

AGES Software, version 8.0 [CD-ROM] (Rio WI: The Master Christian Library Series, 2000) 9.

4. Ibid.
5. Ibid. 8.
6. Canon IV on Justification, cited from <http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/counciltrent.html>
7. There are different translations of this verse that do not bring out the point that it is God's doing. However, Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) argues that the passage is often misinterpreted due a poor KJV translation. 84 – 86.
8. For example "prevent" is used as "go before" in several KJV passages like this one: "But unto thee have I cried, O LORD; and in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee" (Psalm 88:13).
9. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985) 925.
10. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 93-95.
11. Thomas Schreiner, "Does Scripture Teach Prevenient Grace in the Wesleyan Sense?" in *The Grace of God The Bondage of the Will*, Thomas Schreiner and Bruce Ware ed. Vol. 2; (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995) 376.
12. Ibid. 382.
13. I am using "synergist" rather than "Arminian" for this article because it is a somewhat broader category. Arminians are always synergistic by definition, whether or not they use the term. Roman Catholicism is also synergistic. But it would not be correct to call Roman Catholicism "Arminian" since Catholicism predated Jacob Arminius and there are significant differences between typical Protestant Arminian doctrine and the doctrines of Rome. For example, Arminians would affirm or at least like to affirm some of the *solas*, such as Scripture alone and faith alone. But they stumble on the others, and define faith differently than the Reformers did.
14. They include ideas like "Christ is the only one who is elect, others become elect when they accept Christ," or group election: "God chose that there would be a group called the elect but did not determine who would be in the group," or election based on foreknowledge "God foreknew who would choose him and called those 'His elect' and other such evasions. The previously cited work *The Grace of God The Bondage of the Will* contains refutations of these and other Arminian ideas and doctrines.
15. A Word document with all these and other passages is available for free download on our website cicministry.org: <http://cicministry.org/scholarly.php>
16. James Montgomery Boice, *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace? – Rediscovering the Doctrines That Shook the World*; (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001) 167.
17. Ibid. 168.
18. Robert Schuller, *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation*, (Waco, Word Books, 1982).
19. Boice, 32.
20. Ibid. 35.
21. See Bob DeWaay, *Redefining Christianity – Understanding the Purpose Driven Movement*, (Springfield: 21st Century Press, 2006) for documentation of this.
22. Boice, 72.
23. Ibid. 89.
24. Debate between Bob DeWaay and Doug Pagitt, January 2006, CD's are available here: <http://cicministry.org/store.php>
25. Boice, 105.
26. Ibid. 107.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid. 124, 125.
29. It is important to resist hyper-Calvinism. For a good book on the necessity of preaching the universal call to believe see Iain H. Murray, *Spurgeon versus Hyper-Calvinism – The Battle for Gospel Preaching*; (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1995)
30. Finney, *Revival*, 366.
31. Boice, 138-140 explains these.
32. John MacArthur rightly rejects this approach in his books *The Gospel According to Jesus and The Gospel According to the Apostles*, as does Boice, op. cit.
33. Luther, M. 1999, c1972. Vol. 17: *Luther's works, vol. 17 : Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*
34. Boice 161.

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