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OASIS

I'm interested in the Bible. I'm interested in what it teaches about God and about his purpose for mankind. When teaching others about the Bible, it is natural to encounter beliefs others share that differ from my own on any number of issues. When this happens, at times there are difficulties because each person so believes what they are saying that they often fail to step away from their beliefs and consider the reasons they have for believing them in the first place. But discussing different reasons for believing different things often helps bring clarity to such discussions. When it comes to believing the teachings of the Bible, one should first look to it for reasons to believe. However, reasons given outside of the Bible, for beliefs attributed to the Bible, by those who believe the Bible, seem to be the place where most people start.

Having spent time with a number of people who consider themselves "Reformed" thinkers, that is, people who follow and accept the teachings of notable, non-biblical figures of the Reformation such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, and others, it is clear that those who consider themselves "Reformed" have in many respects outstandingly distanced themselves from the Bible, and have replaced the reasons given in it with reasons given by others who claim to teach what it teaches. Of course, many Reformed theologians think in similar terms about Jehovah's Witnesses. In some cases, they are right, too. Indeed, we all are at risk of losing sight of where to look for the best reasons to believe what we believe about the Bible: the Bible itself.

Unfortunately, displacing the teachings of the Bible with traditions of men is nothing new. The Bible teaches that Jehovah God gave laws, history, teaching, prophecy, admonition, encouragement, love, and wisdom, basically everything one would need in order to "fear the true God and keep his commandments" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Why is this important? Because "God himself will bring every sort of work into the judgment in relation to every hidden thing, as to whether it is good or bad" (Ecclesiastes 12:14). Thus, being able to understand God's commandments to "fear" him appropriately, for who he truly is, is critical: God is the sovereign judge of all mankind, and he will judge, for good or for bad, "every sort of work."

Since salvation is "God's gift ...not owing to works" (Ephesians 2:8, 9), we need to have a basic understanding of the sovereign will of God, how this relates to our own will and desire, what pleases him, and an understanding of his purpose for "those who love him" (Deuteronomy 7:9; James 2:5). Since there are many who claim to represent the biblical

teachings concerning God's purpose, his grace, and his sovereignty, and since there are differences important enough to draw clear lines of division between those who otherwise claim to accept the Bible's teachings as true, it is to the Bible we must look for answers, for reasons to believe.

Therefore, in continuing the discussion of differences between the beliefs of Reformed theology and Jehovah's Witnesses, in this article I will define and contrast the basic tenets of the "Reformed" teaching of God's grace and sovereignty with what I consider to be the biblical teaching on these same subjects, represented in large part by Jehovah's Witnesses today.

In Parts One through Three of "The Knowledge of God and the Will of Man," IN MEDIO (November 1, 2006, December 1, 2006, and January 1, 2007), consideration was given to certain aspects of the "Reformed" and to the biblical teaching concerning the sovereign will and knowledge of Jehovah God. In particular, my consideration was in relation to the views and opinions of Reformed scholar and theologian Dr. Robert Morey. This was done in preparation for further discussion and debate of these subjects between Dr. Morey and myself, which is currently being planned. But Dr. Morey is not the only Reformed scholar and thinker out there who has something important to say about the Bible and its teachings on these and related subjects.

In this article I will present the "Five Points of Calvinism" as defined by Dr. James White, as well as his "sixth point," in his book, *The Potter's Freedom: A Defense of the Reformation and a Rebuttal of Norman Geisler's Chosen But Free* ([hereafter, *TPF*] Merrick, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), pages 38–51. I will then provide a critique of these "six" definitions and then present my own and Jehovah's Witnesses' definition of what I consider the true "five points" of basic Bible teaching concerning the grace and sovereignty of Jehovah God.

This article is by no means a complete response to *TPF*. I readily acknowledge that Dr. White provides additional support for his views on these subjects throughout *TPF*. However, I do not believe that anything else he has to say, which I will consider elsewhere at various times, rescues what he wrote in the pages of his book referenced above. Still, it is not my intent here to present either the complete set of arguments used by Dr. White in support of his views, or the complete set of arguments I would use against what he claims, or even in support of my own views on these subjects. Here I am presenting a comparison of the essential claims of the Reformed understanding of God's grace and sovereignty, as presented by Dr. White in the pages of his book referenced, with those of Jehovah's Witnesses, which I here represent.

I will do this by first presenting Dr. White's exposition of the "Five Points of Calvinism," followed by a consideration of his "sixth point" which relates to his view of the "freedom of God" (*TPF*, page 41). I will then offer a critique and comparison of White's/Calvinism's

“Five Points” by means of “five points” of my own, followed by a discussion of White’s “sixth point” in relation to the biblical teaching concerning the true ‘freedom of the Potter.’

“TULIP”

On pages 38–41 of *TPF*, Dr. White provides his readers with a “necessary definition” of the Reformed understanding of the biblical “doctrines of grace.” In doing so, White uses the familiar Calvinist acronym “TULIP.” This acronym is defined and understood by White as follows:

T = Total Depravity:

Man is dead in sin, completely and radically impacted by the Fall, the enemy of God, incapable of saving himself. This does not mean that man is as evil as he could be. Nor does it mean that the image of God is destroyed, or that the will is done away with. Instead, it refers to the *all pervasiveness of the effects of sin*, and the fact that man is, outside of Christ, the enemy of God [*TPF*, page 39; emphasis original to White].

U = Unconditional Election:

God elects a specific people unto Himself without reference to *anything they do*. This means the basis of God’s choice of the elect is *solely* within Himself: His grace, His mercy, His will. It is not man’s actions, works, *or even foreseen faith*, that “draws” God’s choice. God’s election is unconditional *and final* [*TPF*, page 39; emphasis original to White].

L = Limited Atonement:

Since it is God’s purpose to save a special people for Himself, and He has chosen to do so *only* through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ, Christ came to give His life “a ransom for many” so as to “save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). The *intention* of Christ in His cross-work was to save His people *specifically*. Therefore, Christ’s sacrifice is *perfect and complete*, for it actually *accomplishes* perfect redemption [*TPF*, pages 39–40; emphasis original to White].

I = Irresistible Grace:

This is the belief that God is able to raise the spiritually dead sinner to life. This is an act of *efficient* grace. When God chooses to bring one of His elect to spiritual life, it is an act similar to when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead: just as Lazarus was incapable of resisting the power of Christ in raising him from the dead, so too the dead sinner is incapable of resisting the power of God that raises him to spiritual life. This is *not* to say that men have not resisted God’s grace. This doctrine speaks specifically to the grace that brings regeneration, not to

individual acts of sin committed by believers or unbelievers [TPF, page 40; emphasis original to White].

P = Perseverance of the Saints:

Some prefer saying “the preservation of the saints” to emphasize that this is the work of God: others use the phrase “eternal security” to emphasize the impossibility of God’s perfect work of salvation being undone. But whatever one calls it, it is the belief that when Christ saves one of His elect, He will not fail to keep that saved person throughout life and bring them safely into His presence. It is, in short, the belief that Christ is able to save perfectly [TPF, page 40; emphasis original to White].

Dr. White’s “Sixth” Point:

I do not believe the common “five points” listed above is enough for today. There is a sixth point, one that lies at the head of the list, that must be firmly proclaimed and defended today: the freedom of God. ... The phrase “the free and proper kingship of God” is a rather verbose means of saying “God’s sovereignty.” ... God truly can do as He pleases *without getting permission from anyone, including man* ... (Psalm 135:6) ... (Isaiah 14:27) ... (Isaiah 46:9–10) ... (Psalm 33:8–11) ... (Isaiah 41:21–23) ... (Proverbs 21:1) ... (Daniel 4:34–35) ... God is king over all the earth. As the Creator, it is His to do with as *He* chooses. ... Jeremiah 18:4–6 ... *There can be no clash of wills between the Potter and the pots.* ... The conjunction of God’s absolute freedom and His Creatorship results in the doctrine of God’s decrees: the soul-comforting truth that God has wisely and perfectly decreed whatsoever comes to pass in this universe. ... Three scriptural witnesses will testify to this truth. ... [1] (Isaiah 10: 5–7) [and] (Isaiah 10:12–17) ... [2] (Genesis 50:19–21) ... [3] (Acts 4:27–30) [TPF, pages 41–49].

In the above summary of White’s presentation of his “sixth point,” I have added the numbers in brackets near the end of the above quote ([1], [2], [3]), and I have used ellipses (...) several times in order to highlight just the main ideas from the referenced sections of *TPF* with which I will here take issue. As I do so below, I will also fill in some of the “gaps” so that a more complete presentation of his position is given sufficient consideration. Again, the above is merely a summary of Dr. White’s beliefs as expressed by him in the referenced section of his *TPF*. As I said previously, I readily acknowledge that White has provided more in defense of his views in the balance of *TPF* and in other books which he has written on the subjects of God’s grace and sovereignty. I plan on discussing more of what he has written in the future, both in writing and in direct debate with Dr. White. For now, I am restricting my remarks in this article to the beliefs represented by the above six points, with particular interest in White’s “sixth point,” in comparison to the main ideas found in my acronymic presentation of what I consider the biblical teachings for similar subjects.

For additional information about James White's views on the subjects of God's grace and sovereignty, you might consider the entirety of his *TPF* (publication particulars provided above), his *The God Who Justifies* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2001), and Dave Hunt and James White, *Debating Calvinism: Five Points, Two Views* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004). For additional information about my and Jehovah's Witnesses views concerning the biblical teaching of God's purpose, his sovereignty, and the salvation of humankind, see my *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended: An Answer to Scholars and Critics*, 2nd edition (Huntington Beach, CA: Elihu Books, 2000), Chapter 10, as well as the corresponding chapter in my forthcoming 3rd edition, together with the new chapter on the subject of "God's Freedom and the Free Will of Mankind." See also my "The Knowledge of God and the Will of Man," Parts 1-3, available on IN MEDIO, at elihubooks.com, and my, "Does God "know all things" that will occur, before they actually happen?" also on elihubooks.com, under "Upon the Lampstand," February 7, 2007.

For now, let us consider the traditional Five Points against five of my own, compare their biblical merits, and then give attention to White's "sixth point."

"OASIS"

An "oasis" is "something that provides refuge, relief, or pleasant contrast" (Merriam-Webster Online, under "Oasis"). While you might not think that a "tulip" is something that merits a relieving contrast, as we know from the above summary "TULIP" represents a belief system that has become associated with Christianity. But is this belief system Christian? Do the teachings of John Calvin and other "Reformers," for example, deserve to be mentioned in the same breath as the 'kindly yoke' of Jesus Christ (Matthew 11:30)? Is Charles Haddon Spurgeon correct in saying that Calvinism is "but a nickname for biblical Christianity," as represented by R.C Sproul, Jr. (*TPF*, page 16)?

Contrasting the Five Points of Calvinism with five different points relating also to teachings of the Bible on these subjects will help differentiate that which is rooted in the Word of God and that which is a tradition of men superimposed upon God's Word. Such traditions tend to, at some point, 'invalidate' God's teachings, as can be seen from the Jewish religious scholars and leaders of Jesus' day (Matthew 15:6). I contend that the teachings represented by "TULIP" are, to one degree or another, traditions of men that are unscriptural. By "pleasant contrast," I will argue that the five points associated with the acronym "OASIS," below, rightly represent some of the more important aspects of the biblical teachings concerning God's sovereignty and the salvation he offers to mankind. These five points are:

O = Original Purpose:

Whatever Jehovah purposes 'proves to be'; it 'will not return to him without results' (Isaiah 55:11). The Five Points of Calvinism begin with man after the Fall, with his "Total Depravity." But the "Fall" is not what God originally purposed for mankind. Rather, it was expressly *against* God's original purpose (Genesis 1:27–31; 2:15–17). In order to truly understand God's will and purpose, you have to start with it, and from there describe his actions in relation to what he purposes to do. The very First Point of Calvinism starts off on the wrong track by ignoring God's original purpose, by instead focusing on the consequences of rebellion against him (which is viewed as part of God's "eternal" will and purpose), and from there moving toward salvation. The Bible teaches that God's purpose will come to be, and so any discussion of man's salvation after the Fall should rightly begin, not with the Fall itself, but with the purpose of God *before* the Fall, moving then toward the realization of it.

A = Adjustments for the Glory of His Name:

Jehovah is always prepared to and will adjust the means of bringing about what he desires for the glory of his name (Genesis 3:15; Revelation 15:3–4). Jehovah has determined all that can be done by those whom he has created in his image. There is nothing that anyone can do that he does not permit them to do or cause to happen himself. Jehovah knows that we can do things he does not desire; that is how he made us! He knows, too, that if that happens, if those whom he allows to act freely choose to disobey him, then he is quite able to, and willing, though not always desirous of adjusting the means of accomplishing his will.

Jehovah wanted Adam and Eve to "fill the earth and subdue it," to "cultivate [the garden of Eden] and to take care of it" (Genesis 1:28; 2:15). Jehovah did not want Adam to eat from "the tree of the knowledge of good and bad" (Genesis 2:16–17). But Adam ate from it anyway. Since Jehovah's purpose 'will not return to him without results' (Isaiah 55:11), he rightly adjusted the means to his desired end by prophesying about that which would 'restore all things' (Acts 3:21).

Another example of God's readiness to adjust the means of accomplishing his purpose, though not as he desired to originally, can be seen in the example of the Israelites who left Egypt with Moses. It was not Jehovah's first desire to destroy those whom he brought safely through the waters of the Red Sea (Exodus 6:6–8). But because Jehovah decreed to allow those whom he freed to choose whom they would worship, he was right in adjusting his original decree for these people, to destroy them, and then make a new nation of Israelites come out of Moses (Exodus 32:7–10). In so doing, God's greater purpose of having a nation of people through which the promised "seed" (Genesis 3:15; 22:18) could come would without fail still come true. The people whom God allowed to decide for themselves what to do might change, but God's original determination for that which he kept solely within his sovereign control would not.

These are hardly the extent of examples proving that God adjusts some of his decrees for the sake of his greater, original desire. Consider the life of his servant, Hezekiah. Even though Jehovah decreed that Hezekiah "will indeed die

and will not live,” Hezekiah’s tears softened the face of Jehovah and moved him to allow Hezekiah to live longer than he had originally decreed (Isaiah 38:1–5). The end did not change (Hezekiah died), only how long it took to get there did change at Jehovah’s decree, for his glory: “For it is not She’ol that can laud you; death itself cannot praise you ... The living, the living, he is the one that can laud you, Just as I can this day” (Isaiah 38:18–19).

Similarly, God’s purpose for mankind has not changed, but because of God’s decree to allow others to freely decide certain matters apart from his expressed will, the means of realizing his purpose is subject to adjustment according to his desire. Thus, while those who are a part of his original purpose can make choices that affect themselves, changing their place in God’s arrangement (compare Hebrews 6:4–6), they do not change the purpose of God from being realized with or without them (compare Job 35:6–7). The Second Point of Calvinism ignores this fact, and fails to consider the biblical teaching that God’s choices are unconditionally his with reference to (but not on a meritorious basis of) his good pleasure in or rejection of the things we do, things which show whether or not we “love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9; compare Isaiah 64:4).

Jehovah God’s allowance of certain things to be determined by others against his will provides him with an opportunity to have before him only those who will be faithful and loyal to him, unlike Adam and Eve. These are the ones for whom Jehovah adjusts the means of accomplishing his will, who in return glorify God and his great and holy name:

“Great and wonderful are your works, Jehovah God, the Almighty. Righteous and true are your ways, King of eternity. Who will not really fear you, Jehovah, and glorify your name, because you alone are loyal? For all the nations will come and worship before you, because your righteous decrees have been made manifest” [Revelation 15:3–4 (NWT)].

S = Salvation for All Who Believe:

Jehovah provides salvation for “everyone who believes” (Acts 13:39). The work that Jesus Christ “accomplished” (John 19:28–30) is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Genesis 3:15, which Jehovah did not decree “from all eternity.” Rather, he decreed the death of the “seed” only after it was necessary because of the rebellion of Satan and Adam. Jehovah allowed the rebellion to occur, even though he did not want it to happen (Genesis 3:11, 13, 14–19). His prophecy was an ‘adjustment for his glory’ showing that he would give life to those who please him by putting faith in him and in the redeeming power of his Son’s death (John 3:16; Hebrews 11:1, 6). Jehovah God did not need to adjust his purpose for his glory; he could have been glorified by obedience to his will in the first place; he could also have destroyed Adam and Satan and started over, as he similarly considered doing with Moses.

“Believing” or having “faith” must be accompanied by works or it is dead. “Faith alone,” which is a “dead faith,” cannot save. But neither can works done apart

from faith, such as those done according to a “written code,” save you (Romans 2:27, 28; 3:28; James 2:24, 26). You cannot please God merely by executing a list of certain good deeds. There is no “amount” of work you can do to earn life. Instead you must have faith that God will save you and that faith must be alive by its works (Romans 2:6–11; James 2:20). It is *these* works that will serve as the basis for the judgment of all mankind, since they will show whether or not we had faith in God (Romans 2:6–11; Revelation 20:11–13).

Unlike the Reformed belief in “limited atonement,” God “does not desire any to be destroyed but desires all to attain to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Jehovah God adjusted his purpose for his glory by using the ransom of his Son’s life to glorify his firstborn, his own exact image (Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:2), along with a select group that would uniquely belong to him and be ‘patterned after his Son’s image’ (Romans 8:28). These ones are a part of a specially sealed “royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9) that is either literally or symbolically given the number 144,000 in the book of Revelation (7:4–8; 14:1–5). By comparing what is said in Revelation 6:9–11 and Revelation 7:3–4, it is reasonable to conclude that the 144,000 are those who have been “slaughtered because of the word of God and because of the witness work they used to have.” These Christians are “sealed” in Revelation 7:4–8 from what is likely a symbolic depiction of the twelve tribes of Israel, even as James appears to speak symbolically of the “twelve tribes that are scattered about” (James 1:1).

In addition to these “certain firstfruits” who come from the “twelve tribes scattered about,” there are other Christians who come, not out of these literal or symbolic “tribes of Israel,” but “out of the great tribulation” (Revelation 7:13–14). Further biblical support for a distinction between groups of persons who are saved by God through Christ Jesus can be seen from the resurrection of those who will ‘sit on thrones’ for “the thousand years,” compared with those who ‘do not come to life until the thousand years are ended’ (Revelation 20:4–6). Still more evidence for two decrees of God for those who have faith can be seen in Revelation 21:1–14, where “New Jerusalem” is described as “coming down out of heaven from God and prepared as a bride adorned for her husband,” which husband is the Lamb, Jesus Christ (verse 9). This “bride” is made up of those described in the New Testament as being ‘promised in marriage ... to the Christ’ (2 Corinthians 11:2). The descending of this “holy city” signals “the tent of God [being with] mankind” (Revelation 21:3). Further, Revelation 22:1–2 describes “a river of water of life, clear as crystal, flowing out from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of its [= New Jerusalem’s] broad way.” On each side of this river are “trees of life ... And the leaves of the trees [are] for the curing of the nations.” The “bride” of Christ which descends from God does not need any more ‘curing.’ Those to whom it descends, “mankind,” will. All of this is prefaced by John’s vision of “a new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1).

Whether or not there is exactly (not symbolically) 144,000 elected by God as a “bride” for his Son, or a “great crowd” saved for another purpose, it is *God’s purpose for a “new heavens and a new earth,” for “in these,” not “in this” or “in which”* (as if the “new heavens” and the “new earth” are somehow locationally one

place) “righteousness is to dwell” (2 Peter 3:13). Jehovah’s Witnesses are right in teaching this. Reformed theology does not provide a biblical understanding of the “new heavens” or the “new earth,” and it misses the purpose of God for individuals concerning each. But Jehovah’s Witnesses also have claimed too much for the expressed purposes of God for those who belong to either the “new heavens” or the “new earth,” at times making it seem as if the number of those who reportedly partake of the emblems of Christ’s flesh and blood annually represent some sort of cosmic time-clock. That is wrong. No one should dilute the motivations of others by providing an artificial basis for God’s election (age, years in service, and other things that are nowhere in the Bible said to be standards for God’s elect), and then associating this with end-time expectations not clearly expressed in God’s Word (compare 1 Thessalonians 5:1–2).

Jehovah will choose those who belong to his Son (Matthew 20:23). He will do it on his own terms and according to his own time. In fact, it is the sealing of these very ones that stands between “the earth,” “the sea,” and “the trees,” and the “four angels standing upon the four corners of the earth, holding tight the four winds of the earth” (Revelation 7:1–3). But this sealing will be on God’s terms, not ours. After they are “sealed” the “great crowd” appears out of the “great tribulation” and “the One seated on the throne will spread his tent over them” (Revelation 7:15). It should, therefore, be enough for us to simply acknowledge that God will grant salvation for all who believe, teach what the Bible teaches, and leave the things God has in store for “those who love him” between God and each individual (1 Corinthians 2:9). Certainly nothing more than this is claimed for a certainty to belong to the Bible under the first “S” of “OASIS,” even if other aspects of this teaching are believed, with less certainty (such as the literalness of the 144,000), in association with things taught clearly in the Bible.

I = Impossible to Save Yourself:

“One there is that is lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy” (James 4:13). There is no amount of good works you can do to merit salvation. Jehovah will never owe it to you. It is a gift, given to each individual by God through Christ, with reference to the faith that is shown by our works. Those who ‘endure in work that is good’ will be given “everlasting life” (Romans 2:7, 10). If, however, we do not “endure to the end” (Mark 13:13), or if we decide to “disobey the truth” by “turning in the opposite direction” (Isaiah 50:5), then “there will be wrath and anger” (Romans 2:8). Jehovah has decreed that this choice, of whether to do good or to practice what is bad, belongs to each one of us. God the Father will never fail us. He alone is the one who can save and those whom he chooses to come to his Son will indeed come to him. But only those who after being brought to the Son then choose to “believe” in him by feeding off of his life-giving, figurative “flesh” and “blood” will be given “everlasting life” (John 6:47, 53–58, 65).

It is a guarantee that Jesus will never ‘drive away’ such persons. But, again, God has decreed that we may choose to believe or not, even after being allowed by the Father to come to Jesus (verse 66). Dr. White compares the regenerating power of

God with the act of raising the dead, “[J]ust as Lazarus was incapable of resisting the power of Christ in raising him from the dead, so too the dead sinner is incapable of resisting the power of God that raises him to spiritual life” [TPF, 40]. The Bible certainly does not teach that Christians resurrect or regenerate themselves. But the basis for each is the same: the “affection” (John 11:3) God and Christ have for them because of their works. Indeed, “[T]he hour is coming in which all those in the memorial tombs will hear [Jesus’] voice and come out, *those who did good things to a resurrection of life, those who practiced vile things to a resurrection of judgment*” (John 5:28–29).

Lazarus was an example of the resurrection of the “righteous” (Acts 24:15) performed by Jesus to glorify God and build up the faith of others (John 11:4; 12:11). However, just as Lazarus or those who ‘come to life when the thousand years are ended’ can still be ‘misled’ by the Devil after the thousand year reign of Christ (Revelation 20:7–10), Christians who have been born again to a new life in Christ, who have been “once for all been enlightened” and who “have tasted the heavenly free gift,” those who have become “partakers of holy spirit” and who “have tasted the fine word of God and powers of the coming system of things,” can choose to reject their regenerate state and ‘fall away’ and even “impale the Son of God afresh for themselves and expose him to public shame” (Hebrews 6:4–6). This biblical teaching directly contradicts what it represented by the “I” and “P” in “TULIP,” which teach that the regenerating power of God’s grace will always result in the salvation of the person to whom it is extended and that the work of God cannot be “undone” (TPF, page 40) by a person’s rejecting of that which God never abandoned: a person’s salvation through Christ.

It is not a question of God being “dependent upon man’s help for success in this work” (David N. Steele, Curtis C. Thomas, and S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, and Documented*, 2nd edition [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterians and Reformed, 2004], page 55). It is rather a question of our accepting what God continues to work out in us. We must *choose* to “keep on doing these things,” in order to “make the calling and choosing of [us] sure for [ourselves]” (2 Peter 1:10; compare Matthew 7:21). Having a living faith does not “help” God in the process of saving us. It *moves* him to save us, just as our rejection of him and his Son *moves* him not to “revive them *again to repentance*” (Hebrews 6:6; emphasis added). Thus, we can be “enlightened” by God and ‘partake of the holy spirit’ by believing in Christ Jesus, but “we actually become partakers of the Christ only if we make fast our hold on the confidence we had at the beginning firm to the end” (Hebrews 3:14).

We will never be able to earn the right to salvation. It is only by the freedom and sovereignty of God that we can be saved. God’s decree in this respect, however, is absolutely with reference to the things we do, “God is not partial, but in every nation *the man that fears him and works righteousness is acceptable to him*” (Acts 10:34–35).

S = Sovereignty of God:

“My own counsel will stand, and everything that is my delight I shall do” (Isaiah 46:10). I do not have any biblical or personal reason to believe that Jehovah God is not powerful enough to decree every single thing that has, is, or ever will happen. In fact, I, together with Jehovah’s Witnesses as a whole, believe that Jehovah God *has* decreed every single thing that has, is, or ever will happen. But his decreeing everything that has, is, or ever will happen does *not* mean, according to the Bible, that Jehovah decides what has, is, or ever will actually be done. How is it possible to *decree* or determine all that has, is, or ever will happen and at the same time not be the one who *decides* what has, is, or ever will actually be done?

The Bible teaches that Jehovah is the Creator of all things (Isaiah 40:27–28; 42:5; 45:18; 1 Corinthians 8:6). Thus, it is he who decreed the capacities of individuals made in his image (spirits and humans [Genesis 1:26]). It is he who created the spheres of existence (the heavens and the earth [Genesis 1:1; Colossians 1:16; Revelation 10:6]) in which the personally expressive capacities of those made in his image are to make choices. Each and every single choice that has, is, or ever will be made is one that God has decreed is possible. Thus, they have all been “decreed,” in this sense, by him.

Though God has created all of the expressive capacities and spheres of existence in which the choices he has decreed are possible can occur, the Bible does not teach that he is always, or even usually passive in his determination of what occurs. God is very actively involved in the decisions of his creatures! The Bible does not teach that Jehovah sits by and waits for one of the many possibilities he has decreed may occur, to occur. But he has decreed that certain outcomes decreed as possible by him may occur on their own within the limitations of what he has created and, thus, allowed. Adam is just one biblical example that shows Jehovah allows a measure for individuals to make decisions apart from any predetermined decision by God himself for the actions of others whom he has decreed may make such independent decisions. This is obvious from the fact that some of the decisions made by those in his image are absolute rejections of God’s expressed will (Genesis 2:17; 3:6).

It is for Jehovah to decree what others can decide. In this sense, he decrees all things, but he does not decide every thing that is actually done. He decrees all that can be done, desires for certain things to be done, causes things to occur according to his “delight” (Isaiah 46:10), or in other cases allows others to decide for themselves what will be done, which he is always able to adjust for his glory. Thus, though he created Adam with the capacity to make decisions on his own, though he allowed Adam to disobey him, Jehovah enforced the consequences of choosing to act against his expressed will (Genesis 3:19), and went even further by actively ‘driving the man out of the garden of Eden’ and keeping him from returning to it (Genesis 3:24). Under these conditions Jehovah brought forth the promised “seed” (Genesis 3:15) that would accomplish his will, establish his sovereignty, and return all things to him as he desired (Acts 3:21; 1 Corinthians 15:24–25, 28). This is the true God’s sovereignty!

Just as “TULIP” is but a helpful means of remembering key points informing the Reformed understanding of God’s sovereign will as it relates to his grace, I offer “OASIS” as a helpful way of remembering the essential points of my and Jehovah’s Witnesses’ understanding of the biblical teaching of the salvation offered by God according to his sovereign decree. As with the points summarized from White’s *TPF* above for “TULIP,” there is much more than can and will be said to show that what I have stated in summary for “OASIS” above is the biblical teaching on these subjects.

Jehovah has sovereignly decreed that those made in his image would make decisions within his created spheres of heavenly and earthly existence. At the same time he has made known his own desire for what is to occur. But because of his greatness in allowing others to express their own will, rather than his own, at times his original purpose for his creation has not been realized by those he first wanted to see it. But that is because he ‘delights’ in letting others decide to obey him. He will actively cause to occur what he chooses to occur, but according to the Bible he is not only able to decree that others will decide what is done, that is in many cases exactly what he chooses to do, even if it means allowing some to directly disobey his expressed will with undesired consequences (Genesis 2:17; 3:6, 19). But all of such actions are within God’s control, and he will adjust his purpose for his glory and for the eventual fulfillment of what he desires, even if some choose not to be a part of it (Genesis 3:15, 24; Revelations 21:1–4).

The Reformed position, represented here by Dr. White, teaches that “there can be no clash of wills between the Potter and the pots” (*TPF*, page 44). Instead of recognizing and accepting God’s will that others are able to ‘clash their will’ against God’s, even completely reject his expressed will, White teaches that God has eternally, actively “decreed whatsoever comes to pass in this universe” (*TPF*, page 45). Let us take a closer look at this teaching, and some of the reasons given by White in support of it.

The Potter’s *True* Freedom!

Again, I contend that the Bible teaches that Jehovah God decreed the personally expressive decision-making capacities of individuals made in his image (spirits and humans [Genesis 1:26]). He created the spheres of existence (the heavens and the earth [Genesis 1:1; Colossians 1:16; Revelation 10:6]) in which these individuals can make choices. Therefore, each and every single decision that can be made is one that has been actively decreed by Jehovah in that he created the personally expressive capacity to make it, and the sphere of existence in which it can be made.

Though he has decreed that others may make decisions on their own, apart from him but only within the spheres of existence he created, he himself does also actively, within those same created spheres of existence, cause things to occur according to his “delight” that cannot be prevented by anyone (Isaiah 46:10). When Jehovah decides to

act, his decisions will absolutely affect, change, or limit the choices that can then be made by those whom he created. God absolutely permits others to reject his commands, disobey some of his decrees, and pit their will against his own. Because God has decreed that this is so, no one can change his absolute decree to allow decisions by others within his created spheres of existence, while also being active as he chooses. Again, these are his decrees. Thus, he is always sovereign over what occurs.

Dr. White has a different perspective, the Reformed perspective, which he has defined and defended in many respects. Under "TULIP" above I have presented White's summary of his belief in God's "doctrines of grace" (*TPF*, page 38), and also a summary of his "sixth point," the "freedom of God," which, together with White's view of God's Creatorship "results in the doctrine of God's decrees." This White further defines as "the soul-comforting truth that God has wisely and perfectly decreed whatsoever comes to pass in this universe" (*TPF*, page 45). He isolates "three scriptural witnesses" to "testify to this truth" (*TPF*, page 45). I will consider each of these three "witnesses" here to test the credibility of White's position, each of which he presents from the New American Standard Bible (1995):

(1) Isaiah 10: 5-7; Isaiah 10:12-17:

(Isaiah 10:5-7) Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger
 And the staff in whose hands is My indignation,
 I send it against a godless nation
 And commission it against the people of My fury
 To capture booty and to seize plunder,
 And to trample them down like mud in the streets.
 Yet it does not so intend,
 Nor does it plan so in its heart,
 But rather it is its purpose to destroy
 And to cut off many nations.

According to White, this is "one of the most striking evidences of God's sovereign control over the affairs of men" (*TPF*, page 46). While in one sense I could not agree more, the true import of White's description is not supported by this account. White is correct in noting that God is "sending Assyria" (*TPF*, page 46), for the account says so explicitly ("I send it" [verse 6]). Thus, Jehovah is actively causing something to occur that does not appear otherwise would have happened at this particular time. But White misses completely the true nature of Assyria's use by God when he writes:

God is clear: the woe He is announcing is on the very instrument He is using to punish Israel! Assyria is not a willing party to the punishment of Israel: they do not intend to be involved in doing God's work, "but rather it is its purpose to destroy and to cut off many nations [Isaiah 10:7]." Assyria had one purpose, God another, and all in the same historical events. While God says He is using Assyria, He likewise says He will punish them for their *intentions* [*TPF*, page 46].

It is very important to notice White's qualification of Assyria's 'will' and 'intentions' with their not being "involved in doing God's work." This is White's way of preserving the basis for God's judgment against those whom he sends to accomplish his will without their intending to do so. Doing his will is by God's design; the reasons, or intentions for their doing so are not and, thus, are punishable by God. All of this is true! Thus, we have God directing those not inclined to do his will, to do his will by causing them to act according to their own desire, and in so doing accomplish the very thing God wanted, but for different reasons. We have two wills, here, two sets of intentions (God's and Assyria's), with God causing his will to be done by means of the desires of others which are also, at the same time, punishable by him because they are sinful regardless of the end they accomplish.

While Assyria may not have been a "willing party" in terms of doing what they did for the purpose of being "involved in doing God's work," they were most certainly a "willing party" by having a desire to "destroy and to cut off many nations." Jehovah merely used their intentions to bring about his desired end. Jehovah did not cause Assyria to be arrogant nor did he give him the desire to "cut off many nations." Jehovah used what was already "in his [the Assyrian's] heart" (NWT [verse 7]). Jehovah knew the Assyrian's attitude toward other nations (verses 8-10) and that he would feel the same way toward Jerusalem (verse 11). So Jehovah turned the heart of the Assyrian toward Jerusalem (compare Proverbs 21:1), and the Assyrian then carried out his own sinful desire (James 1:14). This is a perfect example of the sovereignty of God influencing the desires of mankind to accomplish his will. But it does not support the teaching that God decreed for the Assyrian to desire to "cut off many nations," or that God's will with respect to Jerusalem was decreed from all eternity. Consider the rest of the account cited by White, which also does not support his claims:

(Isaiah 10:12-17) So it will be that when the Lord has completed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, *He will say*, "I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the pomp of his haughtiness." For he has said, "By the power of my hand and by my wisdom I did *this*,
For I have understanding;
And I removed the boundaries of the peoples
And plundered their treasures,
And like a mighty man I brought down *their* inhabitants,
And my hand reached to the riches of the peoples like a nest,
And as one gathers abandoned eggs, I gathered all the earth;
And there was not one that flapped its wing or opened *its* beak or chirped."
Is the axe to boast itself over the one who chops with it?
Is the saw to exalt itself over the one who wields it?
That would be like a club wielding those who lift it,
Or like a rod lifting *him who* is not wood.
Therefore the Lord, the GOD of hosts, will send a wasting disease among his stout warriors;
And under his glory a fire will be kindled like a burning flame.

And the light of Israel will become a fire and his Holy One a flame,
And it will burn and devour his thorns and his briars in a single day.

The Assyrian developed that sinful desire on its own ("For he [the Assyrian] has said" [verse 13]), apart from Jehovah's decree. Thus, he was punished justly by God for his desires, and for acting on them as if he were the one responsible for what occurred (Isaiah 10:12–14) toward Jerusalem, apart from Jehovah. White is correct in noting that this was God's work (*TPF*, page 47), and as long as he accepts the biblical teaching that outside of this "work" Assyria developed and acted on his own desires, not on God's decrees, then there is no problem between our views, here, though there is still the problem of the unsupportable assertion that God decreed such things from all eternity.

The Assyrian's "staff" is his desire to "cut off many nations," and this is "*his own staff*" (Isaiah 10:24), which Jehovah 'picks up' and uses against Jerusalem. The teaching of this account, namely, that Jehovah uses the wicked desires of others to accomplish his own will and also punish those with the wicked intentions argues against White's claim that "God has wisely and perfectly decreed whatsoever comes to pass in this universe" (*TPF*, page 45). He wisely and perfectly uses whatsoever he decrees may come to pass, but God does not decree everything that comes to pass, other than by his decree of what desires may belong to those whom he made and the extent to which he lets them carry out "the inclination of the thoughts of the heart" (1 Chronicles 29:18).

(2) Genesis 50:19–21:

But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? "As for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. "So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

According to White, by his words here Joseph "saw the over-riding hand of God, guiding, directing, and ultimately meaning *in the same action* to bring about good" through the intentions of his brothers [*TPF*, page 48]. Again, in so far as this is a true reflection of the Bible's teaching that God saw what was happening and involved himself in the affairs of Joseph and his brothers in order to actively bring about his will, White is correct: "the over-riding hand of God" actively does change the course of events, and he does 'guide' and 'direct' them according to his decree, that is, when he determines to do so. God "intervened," as White rightly points out, so that Joseph was not killed by his brothers.

Jehovah knew that Joseph's brothers, though jealous to the point of wanting to kill him (Genesis 37:18), could be brought back to the point of loving their brother, and in the process God would accomplish his purpose. But the desires of men's hearts cannot always be turned. Consider:

Genesis 4:3-13 (NWT):

And it came about at the expiration of some time that Cain proceeded to bring some fruits of the ground as an offering to Jehovah. But as for Abel, he too brought some firstlings of his flock, even their fatty pieces. Now while Jehovah was looking with favor upon Abel and his offering, he did not look with any favor upon Cain and upon his offering. And Cain grew hot with great anger, and his countenance began to fall. At this Jehovah said to Cain: "Why are you hot with anger and why has your countenance fallen? If you turn to doing good, will there not be an exaltation? But if you do not turn to doing good, there is sin crouching at the entrance, and for you is its craving; and will you, for your part, get the mastery over it?" After that Cain said to Abel his brother: ["Let us go over into the field."] So it came about that while they were in the field Cain proceeded to assault Abel his brother and kill him. Later on Jehovah said to Cain: "Where is Abel your brother?" and he said: "I do not know. Am I my brother's guardian?" At this he said: "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground. And now you are cursed in banishment from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood at your hand. When you cultivate the ground, it will not give you back its power. A wanderer and a fugitive you will become in the earth." At this Cain said to Jehovah: "My punishment for error is too great to carry.

As with Joseph's brothers, God "had it in mind for good" (Genesis 50:20) for Cain and for his brother. He did not "intervene" the same way he did with Joseph, however, by keeping Cain from killing his brother Abel. But he did try to get him to change his desire by reasoning with him directly, "If you turn to doing good, will there not be an exaltation?" God determined to let Cain act apart from his preventing him from killing Abel, leaving the two of them alone to see what would happen. Cain did not listen to the voice of Jehovah, killed his brother, and was 'punished for his error.'

Jehovah determined to be more actively involved in similar, future instances involving the jealousy of brothers, as in the case of Joseph and his brothers. But he still only provided the opportunity for others to act on the desires of their hearts. The extent of his involvement is according to his own decree, and thus he is always sovereign in causing or in allowing things to occur. What actually occurs is not always according to his desire, for it is his decree to let certain things happen apart from his absolute direction and guidance. Thus, Cain killed Abel.

The account of Joseph and his brothers shows the extent to which God will involve himself in the affairs of men in order to accomplish his will and to give others an opportunity to change the desires of their heart (Genesis 50:15-18). The account of Cain and Able shows the same thing, though God acted to a different extent in preserving alive the one he wanted to live, this, too, for the purpose of allowing the desires of the hearts of men to become manifest.

(3) Acts 4:27–30:

"For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur. "And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus."

According to White, in this account "we find one single act, freely engaged in by evil men for evil motives, yet, at the same time, eternally predestined for good by God" (*TPF*, page 49). Here we have the most critical flaw of the Reformed position stated explicitly: "eternally predestined." It is not enough for God to be one who decrees all that can occur. It is not enough for God to actively decide what he will let take place and what he will adjust for his own glory. No, the decrees of God must be "eternally predestined." Never mind the fact that the word "eternally" does not appear anywhere in this account. Never mind the fact that the things that are said to have been "predestined to occur" in Acts 4:27–30 were prophesied about, not "eternally," but in Psalm 2:1–2. These facts must be quickly sacrificed in order to prop up the Reformed view of God.

All prophecies concerning the suffering of the Christ relate back to what was prophesied by Jehovah about the 'bruising of the heel' of the promised "seed," the Messiah (Genesis 3:15). Had Adam and Eve not sinned, there would have been no need for any such "counsel" to have been "foreordained to occur," for Adam and Eve would not have died and they would have continued to 'cultivate and to take care of' the garden of Eden, not be 'driven out' out it (Genesis 2:15; 3:24). But in this instance God sovereignly decreed that those made in his image could decide whether or not to obey him and to be a part of his original purpose, or to disobey him. As a result of their decision, made in direct opposition to God's decree, Jehovah further decreed adjustments for the glorious realization of his purpose apart from those who rejected his will.

Though at times the desires of men are made manifest in opposition to God's expressed desire, in one sense it is always according to Jehovah's decree since he is the one who permits all things that occur to occur. Jehovah also actively involves himself in the created spheres of existence, at times by admonition (Genesis 4:6–7), and at times by intervening more directly (Genesis 50:20). But it is not always by 'wisely and perfectly decreeing whatsoever comes to pass in this universe' (*TPF*, page 45). He wisely and perfectly decrees all that can come to pass in this universe (he is the Creator [Isaiah 40:27–28; 42:5; 45:18; 1 Corinthians 8:6]); he wisely and perfectly causes some things to occur apart from the will of others (as in the case of Joseph and his brothers [Genesis 37:18; 50:19–21]); he wisely and perfectly decides what will come to pass in association with the desire of others (as with the Assyrian and Jerusalem [Isaiah 10: 5–7; Isaiah 10:12–17]); and he wisely and perfectly decrees what others can decide on their own

apart from and even in direct opposition to his expressed desired decree (as with Adam and Cain [Genesis 2:16–17; 3:6, 11, 17; 4:3–13]).

The true freedom of God is seen in all of these accounts, and most outstandingly in the prophesied and actual life, death, and resurrection of Jehovah’s firstborn Son. In none of these cases is God required to ‘get permission from anyone’ (*TPF*, page 41), though he may decree beforehand that others can act in such a way as to require that he adjust his purpose for his glory, that is, in order to ultimately realize his purpose for those who love and obey him as he “delights” (Isaiah 46:10; Job 36:11; Jeremiah 7:23; Romans 2:6–11; 1 Corinthians 2:9). Nowhere does the Bible ever speak of such things as having been “eternally predestined” to occur. In fact, the Bible shows clearly that they are not so decreed. Jehovah God is not the God of Reformed theology.

Dr. White’s appreciation for God’s true freedom to decree that others can at times determine what will occur, with God always able to freely adjust events for his ultimate glory, can be seen in the following: “Surely no one can suggest that the cross was an after-thought, a desperate attempt to ‘fix’ things after all had gone awry” (*TPF*, page 48). No, Dr. White, I do not think anyone but you and others like you would put the freedom of God in these terms. But if you are asking whether or not someone, me, for example, is suggesting that Jehovah freely decrees that those made in his image will be allowed to decide certain matters on their own, with God always prepared and willing to make adjustments for his glory, since he knows all that can occur in the spheres of existence that he created, the answer is an emphatic, Yes! More so, that is what the Bible teaches.

Conclusion

The Reformed teachings of God’s grace and sovereignty have very little to do with what the Bible actually teaches. Though acronyms like “TULIP” and books written in defense of the Reformed view use biblical language, their teachings do not reflect what is actually written in Scripture.

I offer “OASIS” as a means of capturing the essence of the biblical teachings of God’s original purpose, his means of bringing his purpose about within the created spheres of existence in which he has decreed that those made in his image can determine certain outcomes, how his active decrees and allowances relate to our salvation, and the fact that God is truly sovereign, as the Creator of all that exists and the determiner of all that can be done. Jehovah God is very active: actively determining what will occur and what he will allow others to decide, which show him “what the heart is” (1 Samuel 16:7).

There is much more in the Bible that should be considered in order to get a complete appreciation for these teachings, and I plan on doing my part in presenting as much of this additional, biblical information as possible in the days ahead. But some may ask,

“How is it that ‘generations of Christian theologians could have missed such a simple truth?’” (Compare White, *TPF*, page 57.) My response is they missed these and other obvious truths, such as the use of God’s own name thousands of times in his own Word, because they choose to ‘miss it’ in favor of their traditions, just like the great learned men of Jesus’ day, such as the scribes and the Pharisees (Mark 7:9–13), and many others after them (2 Thessalonians 2:9–12). There is nothing “hidden” about what the Bible says concerning these five simple points. They are there in the Bible for all to read, and they have been there since the time they were written.

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