

What about Free Will?

A Review by Jay Wegter, Adjunct Professor of Theology, Apologetics, and Spiritual Life at The Master's College.

When I first saw the title of Scott Christensen's book, my reaction was, "Didn't the Protestant Reformers solve that 500 years ago?" But one chapter into the book and my attitude rapidly changed. This book is infinitely more than a rehashing of an historic debate. It is truly an in-depth examination of God's nature and man's nature and the interface between the two.

The author does a remarkable job of patiently describing and illustrating how and why God's sovereignty and man's free agency are compatible. With great grace and winsomeness, Christensen takes on his imaginary interlocutor at every turn. God is in charge and yet our choices are free and responsible—how is this so?

A probing light is cast upon the proposed solutions offered by the libertarian view. Christensen develops the logical consequences of the libertarian view, showing how—over and over again that view paints itself into a moral cul-de-sac.

The book is marvelously organized. With excellent subheads, diagrams and very helpful chapter summaries, glossaries, study questions, and recommended resources. I will be recommending this book to my students and considering it as a text for one of my courses.

As I read the portions about God's sovereignty over sin, I envisioned a tipped over barrel of toxic waste being directed into a catch basin. God's purposes ultimately will be revealed in His directing, confining, limiting, and punishing evil. In so doing, God's perfections will be manifested—not only in His purposes of grace, but also in His just, wise, and righteous dealings with human and angelic sin.

The author has demonstrated the ability to take the profound and invite the reader into conversation with him. He does so by employing everyday situations and events to illustrate his points. This is central to the genius of the book. The reader is never lost in the mire of an abstract proposition. Every assertion is accompanied by an illustration from Scripture and life. By filling his book with everyday illustrations depicting choice, responsibility, consequence, desire, conflicting interests, etc., the author has clearly written for the reader rather than for his theologian peers. These illustrations are so helpful, I found myself using them as memory devices for the doctrines in view.

The triumph of this work is that it goes very deep while utilizing natural language. Consider the depth of the subject that inter-trinitarian love cannot be frustrated. As God extends His own love to the unworthy creature we see a brilliant argument in support of sovereign grace. Christensen dismantles the libertarian that the response to love must be entirely self-generated in order for the love to be genuine.

Another immense plus to this work is its concise nature, all while dealing with every major point of antithesis between Calvinism and Arminianism. The book is never pedantic, but always reader-friendly. While deconstructing his opponent's position, the author never speaks down to him. This work has a way of sneaking up on the reader. Just when

you think that Christensen has fired his greatest caliber salvo, he opens up a magazine of formidable ordnance as he explicates the role of the heart in man's desires and choices. Especially useful are the anticipated retorts from those who oppose compatibilism. Spiritual and moral freedom is freedom of a radically different kind than the freedom we exercise in the daily choices we are offered in life. No wonder Jesus associated the former with a very narrow gate and difficult path. In addition, portions of biblical narrative which illustrate compatibilism are masterfully related: Pharaoh's heart hardening, Paul's shipwreck in the book of Acts.

When I think about how I might utilize this book in my own ministry, here is what comes to mind. It has been said that the preachers of the first and second Great Awakening had the skill to preach *total inability*, *human responsibility*, and *divine sovereignty*—all in the same evangelistic sermon. We seem to have forgotten how to do that. And the consequence is that we have cheapened divine grace in the process.

I fear today that we are preaching a mild form of prevenient grace. And in my circles I also frequently find students attempting to define Calvinism in fatalistic terms. Christensen's work is a powerful corrective to both tendencies. This book has deepened my desire to emulate those preachers of generations past who demonstrated a keen grasp of theology—it filled their sermons biblical anthropology and the doctrine of God, for God is known by how He saves sinners.