

Debating Calvinism

A Sympathetic Synopsis

By: B. K. Campbell

(Part 2)

Considering the blunders and errors that Mr. Hunt committed in the first half of the book it is quite surprising that he persists into the second half. It must be admitted, it is rather challenging to read this book without experiencing a certain amount of frustration. The reason for this is that Mr. Hunt's logical errors and dismissal of White's legitimate arguments seems frequent and intentional. As a Calvinist I believe in the valid exegetical interpretation of scripture, as an Arminian Mr. Hunt has no regard for syntax or exegesis. Certainly, this is a wild problem for any theological debate.

In the second half of the book titled "Calvinism Denied" Mr. Hunt opens up his argument by trying to debunk Calvin and Augustine; as if the whole system of Calvinism were dependent upon the character of these two men versus the character of Christ and teaching of scripture. I must admit that the first line of Dave's argument against Calvin aroused such laughter in my heart that I chuckled away into the night without restraint. The quotation is reproduced as follows: "How can anyone call Calvin a great exegete, considering his faulty reasoning and false doctrines?"ⁱ One cannot help but wonder if Mr. Hunt has actually ever read Calvin? This line arouses both laughter, because of its rhetoric and frustration because of its error.

That Calvin was a great exegete is obvious from his 22vol. Commentary set that covers most of the bible. The reader cannot help but to be curious as to what Mr. Hunt means when he refers to Calvin's 'faulty reasoning' and 'false doctrines'. Now be it noted that every line and space in Calvin's writing is not inerrant, no, that belongs to scripture; however, that Calvin was a skilled exegete goes without saying. Just as we cannot call all of Calvin's writing inerrant, so no man may call all of Calvin's writing errant. This is an example of Mr. Hunt's prejudice against Calvin's doctrine and character.ⁱⁱ

To say that Calvin used 'faulty reasoning' is really an example of the fact that Mr. Hunt does not understand reason. Mr. Hunt has demonstrated his incompetence in this area more than once throughout the debate. And it is precisely because of this that his opinion of what constitutes 'sound reasoning' is irrelevant. White's response to Mr. Hunt regarding Calvin is that Calvinism as a biblical doctrine is not contingent upon Calvin but rests upon the testimony of scripture. Thus even if Mr. Hunt's argument was relevant and not based on one sided scholarship, Calvinism would still suffer no defeat because Hunt's argument has nothing to do with scripture and therefore may be legitimately dismissed as not harming Calvinism.

As put forth by White who speaks for many Christians regarding this matter, "I believe what I believe not because John Calvin taught it but because the consistent exegesis of the text of Scripture leads me inevitably to the truths of the doctrines of Grace".ⁱⁱⁱ White then proceeds, explaining that Mr. Hunt's argument and attack on Calvin has nothing to do with the case established by White; thus Mr. Hunt displays his

“fundamental misunderstanding of White’s position”.^{iv} The questions that arises in the mind of the reader: ‘if Mr. Hunt misunderstands White’s position so blindly then how is it possible for him to argue against White’s position so confidently?’ How about because Hunt is not so much arguing against Calvinism as he is, through his agenda, promoting man’s sovereignty and autonomy.

By this point in the debate it should be obvious to the reader that there are two opponents, but only one is really debating. Sadly, after having read the book and looking back in reflection I cannot help but feel that this was the best argument that Mr. Hunt used throughout the entire book, yet all the while it has nothing to do with Calvinism.

Another thing that James points out about this argument used by Hunt is that it is “called poisoning the well. It is an appeal to the emotions of those who are easily prejudiced. If you can paint someone as horrible from the start, you can inculcate bias, even if there is no logical reason to do so.”^v This is the tactic implemented not only by Mr. Hunt but many other Arminians seeking to persuade against the doctrines of grace. These arguments carry no weight and are only effective on those persons who do not understand the basic rules of logic.^{vi}

One cannot help but be frustrated with an opponent who ‘poisons the well’. Indeed this contributes to the frustration experienced by the reader regarding Dave Hunt’s perspective. If Mr. Hunt was actually using sound theological arguments, or for that matter, if he was actually engaged in the debate it would be a much less frustrating task to suffer through his material. This book will worry Calvinists not because Calvinism is defeated but because Mr. Hunt’s arguments are so premature and problematic, his dismissal of all that is biblical is very troubling. This is what the majority of modern evangelical Churches are made of; too use Hunt’s words about Calvin ‘faulty reasoning and false doctrines’.

One of the positive things that might be said about this book is that it brings to light the hidden presuppositions of modern day Arminians and annihilates arguments thrown against the doctrines of grace, with sound biblical logic and clear exegesis.

Chapter nine starts out with a few questions posed by Mr. Hunt: ‘How could God, who is love, predestine anyone to eternal torment, much less take pleasure in doing so? How could God who is love, not love all mankind when He commands us to do so? How could God love those He has predestine to eternal damnation and from whom He withholds the gift of grace and eternal life?’^{vii}

All of these questions suffer from the same defect; each one is contingent upon an understanding of God’s love that is divorced from scripture.^{viii} Mr. Hunt seems to believe that God is somehow ‘obligated’ to bestow mercy and love on all men. Again, this seems to be the presupposition behind all of Dave Hunt’s reasoning. White asks a few questions quite relevant to the topic of God’s love: ‘Is anyone going to seriously argue that God loved the Egyptian foot soldier crushed under the falling waters of the Red Sea in the same way He loved Moses, who passed safely thorough the sea?’^{ix}

Apparently so, Mr. White, Dave Hunt is taking up this very challenge. Perhaps it would be better to say that Mr. Hunt assumes this position because he certainly does not respond to White’s relevant questions.^x White goes on to ask ‘is not Christ’s love for the Church utterly unique in its character? Will someone actually suggest that Christ loves any other origination, such as the United Nations, in the same way and to the same extent

He loves the Church?"^{xi} From Mr. Hunt's perspective we would have no choice but to answer in the affirmative.

Hunt's warped view regarding God's love assumes that God must have 'equality' (as defined by Dave not by scripture) that is distributed to all mankind. James White explains: 'If we derive our beliefs from the Bible (rather than assuming them as a tradition and then reading them back into Scripture), we will conclude that the phrase 'God is love' does not mean that 'God has the same kind and level of love for all things, including for each and every single individual human being.' No matter how one understands 'JACOB I LOVED, ESAU I HATED' (Romans 9:13), this verse alone should be enough to refute such an errant view of God's love."^{xii} It is sad that the underlying principle of error in Arminian theology unusually centers on a distorted concept of the love of God.

Dave is true to Arminian tradition in that he holds a view of God's love that has nothing to do with scripture. Even though Mr. Hunt would say that he is not an Arminian his doctrine is identical to that branch of theology. The parallels between the church of Rome and Hunt's heretical doctrine are staggering similar. Both affirm the autonomy and will of man, both make God's will out to be frustrated by man's choice, both present only one side of scripture and finally both believe that man can resist God's grace.

For one who tries to argue that the Reformed position is identical to that of Rome Mr. Hunt sure has a great deal of similarity with Rome regarding his position. The issue of God's love that is raised in chapter nine is so toughly refuted by White that Mr. Hunt can only say 'I do not like it'^{xiii}. Take the following quote for example: 'White makes the point that God and man are 'free' to love different people in different ways. True. But the different ways to love different people (e.g., wife, child, friend, neighbor) cannot include predestinating to eternal torment anyone who could be saved. That's not love at all.'^{xiv} Says whom Mr. Hunt your tradition or scripture? Given Mr. Hunt's lack of biblical evidence we must conclude that it is clearly the latter.

Moving on to chapter ten we find that Mr. Hunt attempts to argue for a position of synergism.^{xv} His case will be outlined as follows: 1) the bible contradicts the teaching of monergism.^{xvi} 2) Hunt quotes passages of scripture such as (Galatians 3:26), (Acts 16:31), (Romans 10:9), (Luke 8:12) and many other passages assuming that these make his case. 3) Dave assumes that Calvinists only presuppose that regeneration proceeds new birth; reason being is that three points must collapse according to Mr. Hunt. Thus men do not believe in monergism because it is biblical but because they have a commitment to the five points of Calvinism. 4) With great repetition Mr. Hunt laments that there is not "one Scripture to support the view" that regeneration precedes new birth.

Before White can respond to all of Mr. Hunt's errors he must first point out to the reader: 'It is difficult to respond concisely to such a presentation, for it takes only a few words to present an error but many more to correct it.'^{xvii} Let it first be noted that the whole issue of monergism verses synergism has to do with the condition and state of mankind, it has to do with ability and inability not salvation. Even though salvation is the ultimate aim of monergism the question has to do with man's ability. It might also be observed that Mr. Hunt's scripture bullets contain little weight because he refuses to handle the original language.^{xviii} White first and foremost points out to the reader that Mr. Hunt's "presentation unfortunately engages in a tremendous amount of rhetorical argumentation aimed at straw men."^{xix}

One thing is obvious by the end of this debate and that is that Mr. Hunt is a deadly opponent, not because he knows how to debate, but because he resorts to rhetoric and appeals to the emotions of his audience; his arguments have nothing to do with logic. White points out: 1) the most fundamental error of Hunt regarding regeneration is Dave “confusing *regeneration* with the entirety of *salvation*.” As put forth by White: “Salvation includes regeneration, forgiveness, adoption, and sanctification.”^{xx}

Regarding Mr. Hunt's endless scripture references White responds: “To confuse *regeneration* with *saved* and then quote dozens of scriptures about being saved by faith is to engage in empty rhetoric that has nothing to do with the question under debate, which remains clear: Can dead rebel sinners exercise saving faith to cause their own spiritual birth?”^{xxi} When put this way much clarity is brought to the topic under debate. Mr. White also tells the reader to note that Dave merely ‘passes over’ passages discussed representing a positive case for the inability of man.

Continuing on with White's points: 2) White shows that Hunt's position is based on tradition and not scripture. This renders every point made by Mr. Hunt problematic, for not only does White assert this, but he also gives clear reference from scripture to back up his assertions. Again, just like it was in the first half of the debate Dave has ignored the clear teaching of (John 6:44) and (Romans 8)^{xxii}. Both points made by White refute the statement that there is not “one Scripture to support the view” of monergism. Likewise, point one mentioned above collapses, as do all the other points Dave tried to argue.

From all of this we can only conclude that it is not the Calvinist who is guilty of a pre-commitment to Calvinism, but that it is the Arminian who is committed to his tradition; he will not let go of tradition even when such is proven unbiblical. Thus synergism is considered true not because it is found in scripture, but because the synergist has a pre-commitment to libertarian theology, which he will force on scripture regardless of the teaching in scripture.

As said by White: “As Paul had expressed it, it is ‘by His doing you are in Christ Jesus’ (1 Corinthians 1:30). Man's traditions would have us hear that as saying ‘He made it possible for you to join yourself to Christ Jesus,’ but that is not what it says. First John 5:1 says that all those who have been born of God are believing. Salvation is all of God, all to His glory alone. *Soli Deo Gloria!*”^{xxiii}

In the preceding chapters that conclude the book there is an inflation of rhetoric from the pen of Mr. Hunt. It can hardly be said better than White has put it. “Dave Hunt's forth presentation is marked by shrill rhetoric, an incredible lack of understanding of the issues he has chosen to denounce, and a scattergun approach that presents a disjointed collage of false allegations against Reformed theology containing so many basic errors of fact and logic that one could fill a book with in-depth refutations. To say it is disappointing is a gross understatement.”^{xxiv}

Sadly, this is the atmosphere of engagement for the rest of the debate. As White points out the problem is that, “Mr. Hunt does not understand the issues before him.” And as was pointed out earlier if one does not grasp the issues up for debate one really cannot engage in debate. The following quote from chapter eleven demonstrates the error of Hunt's position:

“Is it Hunt's view that Christ intercedes for all those who end up in hell? If so, what did this intercession accomplish? What was its nature? Is there disharmony in the

Godhead, the Son seeking to save but the Father not agreeing with His desires? Or, as it seems more likely, is Hunt here admitting that the Father can seek the salvation of each individual, the Son can die to secure it, and the Spirit come to bring conviction of sin, and yet the entire desire and work of the triune God collapse because of the unwillingness of the sovereign creature, man? Yes, this is indeed Mr. Hunt's view, and I simply do not understand its appeal to the person who boasts only in the Lord."^{xxv}

There is not much more that needs to be said regarding Dave Hunt's position in chapter eleven. It would be a waste of space to insert his bunk arguments just for the sake of trying to show how he attempted to make his point. All of this is as bad as it seems, Hunt's position is exactly how it has been described.^{xxvi}

In chapter twelve Hunt moves into deep water discussing God's sovereignty and man's will. It is quite obvious that he is outmatched by White and added to this he has no theological understanding of the issue up for debate. A few of the mistakes committed by Mr. Hunt in chapter twelve are as follows: 1) Mr. Hunt misrepresents the Reformed position by stating that it teaches men have no will. 2) Hunt quotes scriptures that have no bearing on the biblical teaching regarding man's will such as (2 Samuel 7:27), (Daniel 1:8), (Matthew 13:23), (1 Corinthians 7:35) and (2 Corinthians 9:7). 3) Mr. Hunt tries to allocate that secondary causes are a contradiction, but does not demonstrate why.

As White says regarding this: "He dismisses the reality of Reformed belief simply because it is contrary to his Arminian position. Since it does not fit in his system and he does not understand it, he must reject it."^{xxvii} 4) Dave argues that even though Christ called forth Lazarus from the grave, this might demonstrate his power over physical matter, but Christ has no power over man's internal will. James refutes this bunk notion by quoting from John 5:21, showing that this passage is not limited to physical life alone, but extends to spiritual life as well.

5) Hunt twists the clear teaching of Romans 9:16 trying to make such indicate that man can will to receive God's mercy. White wastes no time pointing out this error, and once again he gives clear exegesis of what Romans 9 says. The problem seems to be that Mr. Hunt is not listening, nor is he able to follow the clarity of White's arguments; perhaps this is so because Dave does not like the conclusion of White's arguments.

Moving into the thirteenth chapter of the book we find the topic is 'Salvation Offered to All'. Mr. Hunt opens by saying that Calvinism voids the commandment of Christ found in (Mark 16:15), "teaching that the non-elect cannot believe the gospel and that the elect are regenerated without it." "That belief" says Mr. Hunt "entangles Calvinists in a web of contradiction."^{xxviii} Sadly, once again Mr. Hunt does not explain how such a scripture passage is made void through the teaching of God's elect?

Let it be stated clearly (not in Dave Huntian language) that there are vessels of wrath and vessels of mercy (see Romans 9); one demonstrates the glory of God while the other is the object of judgment. No consistent Calvinist would ever teach that men are saved apart from the preaching of God's Word. Mr. Hunt confuses this issue once again and misrepresents the Reformed perspective. Accordingly, White already explained this to Dave in a preceding chapter and I quote:

"One of the first things any person honestly studying the Reformed faith comes to understand is that we believe that God ordains both the ends and the means. God has not only elected a people unto salvation but has chosen to use particular means to accomplish His purpose. Specifically, He uses the preaching of the gospel to bring His elect unto

salvation. Since we do not know who the elect are, we are to preach the gospel to every creature, trusting that God will honor His truth as He sees fit in the salvation of His people.”^{xxxix}

Now where does this leave Mr. Hunt? How does he explain (Mark 16:15)? Does he not compromise the Sovereignty and Power of God by imposing tradition on scripture that will not allow him to interpret any text out of his traditional context? Yes, this is exactly the position of Mr. Hunt. The best example of Dave’s tradition providing the context for his interpretation of scripture is clearly seen in his handling of (John 3:16). This is without a doubt the most favored text of all libertarian Arminians. Mr. Hunt says: ‘Calvinists turn ‘for God so loved the world’ into ‘God so loved the elect’’. This is a poor appeal to emotion and a good example of resorting to rhetoric.”^{xxx}

As James White once again clearly exegetes the passage: ‘One can pour all the emotion one wishes into ‘but the bible says whosoever!’ but until one deals with what the Holy Spirit actually has given us in the original text and the fact that there is nothing there to support that idea, one is preaching a tradition, not divine truth. It is purely a traditional interpolation to take ‘whosoever’ to mean ‘there is no election on God’s part.’ All the passage is saying is that all the ones who believe will have eternal life. It does not even attempt to address who will believe or any of the related issues like human ability or inability and the nature of saving faith.”^{xxxi}

White concludes the chapter by pointing out three fatal errors made by Hunt: 1) an error in the grammar of the text in John 3:17. White clearly corrects Dave’s misunderstanding and error of the text. 2) Mr. Hunt tries to excuse the weight of Acts 13:48 by stating: ‘it would be unreasonable for this one verse to contradict hundreds of others offering salvation to all.’^{xxxii} Where would those hundreds that you speak of be located Mr. Hunt, because we sure do not find reference to hundreds of relevant passages quoted by you in this book. 3) Mr. Hunt tries to give a paraphrase of (Matthew 23:37).

To this White refutes Hunt with the following questions: ‘Were all the woes of Matthew 23 directed to all Judah and Israel, Mr. Hunt? And what of the simple fact, neglected in Hunt’s errant ‘paraphrase’ of the text, that the ones Jesus sought to gather together were not the ones He was addressing, but their ‘children’? If Jesus makes the differentiation, why doesn’t Hunt?’^{xxxiii}

In the final chapter the discussion is on the assurance of salvation. Again, like all of the preceding chapters before, Mr. Hunt tries to claim that man is saved of his own free will, but cannot lose his salvation because he is kept by Christ regardless of his will. The contradiction that appears in this final chapter is that Dave Hunt is not willing to follow the logic of his libertarian free will theology to its logical conclusion. If man is saved by an action of his will, then why can he not exercise that same freedom and will himself out of the fold?

Ultimately the logic of Hunt’s thinking, regarding the matter of eternal security, is inconsistent with what he teaches regarding the matter of the will. As White points out: ‘reduce Jesus to the role of making us ‘savable,’ and you no longer have the slightest reason to believe that, once a person is in Christ, he will remain there. But strip a man of his pretended autonomy, recognize his utter dependence and God’s unparalleled power, and accept the truth of the eternal nature of Christ’s saving work (and its inability to fail), and you will find a firm and necessary foundation.”^{xxxiv}

Such is the consistent teaching of Reformation theology. In the popular doctrines of Arminian theology men do not find security for the soul. Indeed, Arminian theology, no matter how attractive it might appear, is powerless to demonstrate the teaching of scripture. In the end, the Arminian has made salvation out to be impossible, God's plans are utterly frustrated and the work of Christ is left incomplete. Let us be convinced therefore of the rancid interpolation interjected upon the sound teaching of scripture by false Arminian tradition.

If we will escape the many errors found in man's tradition, we must let God be true, but every man a liar. There is something very wrong with an interpretation of scripture that will not conform to scripture. Such a view leaves one without the aid and power of scripture. To conclude with a few words by White: 'Dave Hunt's denial of Calvinism is not based upon careful, consistent exegesis of the biblical text. It is based upon his traditions, which then determine the meaning of the biblical text and therefore (and this is very important) cannot be tested by that biblical text. Those traditions become infallible in and of themselves, even if they are contrary to the actual meaning of the text.'^{xxxv} Thus the same may be said of all traditions that attempt not to conform to the biblical doctrines of grace.

Post-Script

The errors made by Mr. Hunt are those common of all Arminians. His persistent, pragmatic quotation of biblical text with no regard for the actual syntax of the text is repulsive. Any libertarian dogmatist seeking to take refuge in the arguments presented by Mr. Hunt will not be able to do so without irreparable damage. Mr. Hunt's view amounts only to a subjective preference that he forces on scripture, through careless handling of the text.

White teaches again and again that Mr. Hunt completely dismisses relevant passages of scripture in order to maintain his 'low' and tainted idea of God. The god that Mr. Hunt defends is not the God of scripture. Hunt's god must submit to the will and actions of men; he is no better than a deistic slave. Why does Dave's view of God make God out to be a servant? Because according to Dave Hunt's radical revision, the attribute of God's Love is for all unto salvation, divorced from any notion of God's Justice.

The love of God must not overthrow the Justice of God and the Justice of God must not desecrate the true Love of God. This is the repeated error of Mr. Hunt. It is the argument of White and those of the Reformation (above all scripture) that the God of the bible must not be changed or conformed to man's ideological false image. And it is here that Mr. Hunt and all other Arminians stand guilty.

There is only one true God and He is sovereign over the works of His hands; like a potter over His clay. To deny God Justice and fight for a god of unreal-love is to ignore the God of scripture. The question is not does He exist, but what kind of God is He? Likewise the debate is not over salvation, but is over the nature and character of God. If scripture has not determined one's position of God then one's opinion of God cannot be correct; as it is, it is only opinion.

We must view all of scripture, not pass over that which contradicts our view and idea of God. Our idea of God must conform to scripture, not scripture to our idea. And this is the great error of Mr. Hunt and all other Arminian controversialists. These

contradictions, if apparent, cry out that we have notions and theories inconsistent with the whole teaching found in scripture. Thus we have lived with a partial view of reality.

The only response is repentance, conversion from false theories and tautologies of tradition, to objective, solid, tough-minded, exegesis that shapes what we know of God, not shaping God by what we traditionally know. The difference? One view exalts and glories in the ability and work of man, the other view exalts and glories in the sovereignty and work of God. In this way God has secured for Himself a chosen people.

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ⁱ “Debating Calvinism”, second half of the book titled “Calvinism Denied”, certainly a titled chosen by Dave Hunt. Quote is taken from page 227.

ⁱⁱ There may in fact be difficulties surrounding the life of Calvin, but this in no way makes his teaching of scripture false. The fact that Dave Hunt attempts to say that Calvin was a poor exegete is outlandish. Calvin put a new standard on the term ‘Christian scholar’. Indeed, Dave may say he does not like Calvin, but there is no room to boast that he was a poor exegete. And it is in this way that Mr. Hunt manifests his prejudice.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid pg. 239

^{iv} ibid pg. 239

^v ibid pg. 251

^{vi} The most basic rule of logic is called ‘the law of non-contradiction’. It states ‘proposition A cannot be non-A at the same time it is A’. It must either be A or non-A, it cannot be both.

^{vii} Ibid pg.255

^{viii} For a good explanation of God’s love see Vincent Cheung’s ‘Systematic Theology’, pgs. 60 -74, published by- Reformed Ministries International. This book may be obtained free of charge at www.rmiweb.org

^{ix} ibid pg.267

^x That is, Mr. Hunt does not argue for this position but merely assumes this position. If Mr. Hunt tried to argue this position he would merely further demonstrate his prejudice against Reformed doctrines.

^{xi} ibid pg.268

^{xii} ibid pg. 268

^{xiii} Mr. Hunt does not actually utter, ‘I do not like it’, but this is the conclusion that is justly reached given the lack of biblical argumentation for his position.

^{xiv} ibid pg.273

^{xv} **Synergism:** "...the doctrine that there are two efficient agents in regeneration, namely the human will and the divine Spirit, which, in the strict sense of the term, cooperate. This theory

accordingly holds that the soul has not lost in the fall all inclination toward holiness, nor all power to seek for it under the influence of ordinary motives."

^{xvi} **Monergism:** In theol., The doctrine that the Holy Spirit is the only efficient agent in regeneration - that the human will possesses no inclination to holiness until regenerated, and therefore cannot cooperate in regeneration.

^{xvii} *ibid* pg.293

^{xviii} Even worse is that the passages of scripture that he quotes often have very little to do with the topic up for debate.

^{xix} *ibid* pg.293

^{xx} *ibid* pg.293

^{xxi} *ibid* pg.294

^{xxii} It might also be noted that when Dave did try to deal with these passages it was demonstrated by James Whit that he was guilty of imposing foreign view on the text.

^{xxiii} *Ibid* pg.299

^{xxiv} *Ibid* pg.319

^{xxv} *Ibid* pg.332

^{xxvi} The position of Dave Hunt seems so absurd and problematic that one is inclined to believe that it cannot be true, but the awful truth is that it is, and I am afraid this is Hunt's best.

^{xxvii} *ibid* pg.349

^{xxviii} *ibid* pg. 363

^{xxix} *ibid* pg.321

^{xxx} Dave's conclusion has nothing to do with the teaching drawn from the exegesis of scripture.

^{xxxi} *ibid* pg. 378

^{xxxii} *ibid* pg 386

^{xxxiii} *ibid* pg.388

^{xxxiv} *ibid* pg. 406

^{xxxv} *ibid* pg.419