

A REVIEW ARTICLE

What Love Is This?

Reviewed by
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What Love Is This? Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God by Dave Hunt. Sisters, OR: Loyal Publishing, 2002, 436 pp. \$15.99.

The debate over God's sovereignty in salvation has reached a new low with the publication of this book. Having heard rumblings about it, I purchased a copy in order to read Hunt's arguments for myself. Honestly, having read little more than the introduction and first chapter, I set it aside, believing that my time could be much better spent—I was only nineteen pages into the book before it was clear to me that this was not a serious book. Yet to my great surprise, over the next few months I kept hearing reports that it was being recommended as a profitable book. Apparently, others were taking this book seriously, and if that was the case, then I needed to give it a serious evaluation. Reluctantly, therefore, I picked it up again and worked my way through it. I wish I could say that my original assessment was off target, but I do not believe it was. That anyone would treat it as a serious work on this very important subject is quite alarming. That it is recommended to others as profitable should be a matter of great concern to those of us who care deeply about the spiritual and theological health of fundamentalism. It is that concern which has driven me to invest the time and energy required to prepare this review article.

The task of writing a review article based on this book has been challenging. The book does not lend itself easily to the task. Hardly a page of my copy is not annotated with some matter of concern regarding Hunt's assertions or method. Cataloguing all of these is a difficult job, but communicating them without boring the reader is harder still. The circular style of Hunt's approach makes the reader wade

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through the same argument time after time.² The repetition may have some rhetorical value, but it does not improve the argument.

The kinds of arguments that Hunt makes genuinely test the patience of any reader that disagrees with him—this is a book that may preach well to the choir, but is not likely to convince those who believe some of the things that Hunt is writing against. It should not surprise anyone that this book has provoked a very negative reaction among those who believe in God’s sovereignty over the matter of personal salvation. When their understanding of the Scriptures is labeled as blasphemy (p. 132), it is bound to stir a strong response. While I suppose there should be comfort in Hunt’s concession that he “believe[s] Calvinists are saved and most of them do preach the gospel,” he follows that with the claim that “there is a distinct impression that we are talking about two different ‘Gods’ and two different ‘gospels.’ One is described in the Bible; the other is the product of Calvin’s peculiar interpretation” (p. 153).

My initial reaction was to ignore the book, but when a book loaded with errors and invective becomes a hot item on the recommendation list of pastors, educators, and other leaders, it cannot safely be ignored. Every pastor stands under the responsibility to hold “fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict” (Titus 1:9). Dave Hunt has moved beyond offering a different interpretation of the doctrine of salvation; he has engaged in an attack on important biblical truths and has opened the door to serious, potentially deadly error.

This review article has two parts: (1) an examination of the trustworthiness and credibility of the book, and (2) an examination of its basic thesis.

THE CREDIBILITY OF *WHAT LOVE IS THIS?*

Due to the success of Dave Hunt’s other writings and efforts, it seems that *What Love Is This?* (*WLIT*) has been accorded a level of credibility based on assumption rather than proof. The danger of this with regard to any work hardly needs to be pointed out; each effort by a writer must be evaluated on its own merits, not the credit of a good reputation. When considered on its own, *WLIT* proves to be an untrustworthy guide to this very important debate. *WLIT*’s lack of credibility is evidenced by: (1) poor research and documentation;

²E.g., the issue of Calvin’s “grossly un-Christian behavior” in Geneva first appears in the introduction (p. 14) and reappears many times throughout the book.

(2) misrepresentation of its sources; (3) flaws of exegetical commitment and competence; and (4) repeated use of fallacious arguments.

Poor Research and Documentation

Upon first examination, *WLIT* appears, based on its extensive endnotes, to be a thoroughly researched work, but closer examination reveals that reality differs from the appearance. Rather than indicating extensive research, the endnotes present only the facade of scholarship and research. The extensive use of secondary sources for quotations calls into question Hunt's actual familiarity with the works he cites, and the real extent of Hunt's reliance on secondary sources is often obscured by the fact that he is inconsistent in his documentation. Sometimes he cites a work as if he is using the primary source, but then the same work will be cited based on a secondary source. For example, Hunt provides a quote that the endnote attributes to an article by Joseph M. Wilson, but on the very same page Hunt quotes the same man from the same article and attributes it to a secondary source (pp. 353, 374). This makes one wonder how many times Hunt has provided documentation *as if* he is using the primary source when in fact he is relying on secondary sources.

The documentation in *WLIT* is marred in other ways as well. Hunt writes that "Cairns explains the major differences" between Arminianism and Calvinism, yet the endnotes attribute the quoted material to Arminius (pp. 78, 91). I agree with Vance that "there is too much use of ellipsis and brackets."³ Hunt strings together quotes by Underwood (drawn from a book by Fisk!) regarding Spurgeon drawn from a four-page section of a book (pp. 122, 123). In another place an ellipsis within a six-line quotation represents the piecing together of lines originally separated by 20 pages! (pp. 55, 58). The use of elliptical marks is not intended for this purpose, and this abuse of them lends itself too easily to manipulation of sources.

The value of Hunt's sources is called into question when one finds him citing William Grady's *Final Authority* as a basis for discrediting Augustine (p. 49). Anyone familiar with this King James-only diatribe should immediately wonder about Hunt's judgment in gathering proof for his case. And if that is not enough, Hunt quotes from Peter Ruckman's *The History of the New Testament* to argue that Augustine was "the first real Roman Catholic" (pp. 51, 58). Not only is Hunt here drawing from very unreliable sources, he is glaringly inaccurate and

³Laurence M. Vance, "A Review of Dave Hunt's *What Love Is This? Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God*," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Autumn 2002): 44.

anachronistic in calling Augustine a *Roman Catholic*.⁴

Hunt's use of these quotes from men like Grady and Ruckman are evidence of a basic weakness in the entire work, namely that Hunt confuses the concepts of documentation and argumentation. He operates by the principle that providing a quote from another book or simply citing another work is actually proof of something. The thought seems to move like this: (1) Hunt makes an assertion; (2) Hunt quotes or cites someone else who said the same thing or something similar; then (3) Hunt concludes that this proves the point. But the only thing that has been proved is that someone else said the same thing that Hunt says. The result is a collection of opinion (i.e., unsubstantiated judgments), not actual argumentation. A genuine argument attempts to prove some point by means of reasons and evidence. Much of Hunt's documentation merely makes assertions without providing reasons and evidence. This is the manner, for example, in which Augustine is labeled a Roman Catholic, and the King James Version is declared to have Calvinistic errors.⁵

A good professor will quickly tell you that the presence of an abundance of endnotes does not guarantee thorough research and scholarship. It is not the quantity of documentation that ultimately matters; it is the quality and accurate use of documentation that determines the thoroughness of the research. Dave Hunt has succeeded in citing many sources, but some (many?) of these he never actually saw, some of them are almost impossible to verify, some of them are unreliable sources, and many of them add nothing to the argument.

Misrepresentation of Sources

At the center of a book's credibility is the reliability with which it uses its sources—does it represent them accurately and honestly? It is at this point that another serious blow to *WLIT*'s trustworthiness is found. This is a very serious accusation, but the evidence confirms it. There are clear places where Hunt misrepresents his sources. For example, on p. 19, Hunt claims that "Norman F. Douty lists more than seventy Christian leaders who opposed Calvinism," when, in fact, Douty's real claim is that they were advocates of "General Redemption" (i.e., that Christ's atonement was for all men).⁶ This

⁴Even Vance, who agrees with Hunt's overall thesis, disagrees with Hunt at this point ("Review," p. 43).

⁵This is one of the ironic aspects of the book's popularity in certain circles—some men who attack anyone who questions the accuracy of the KJV are now recommending a book which accuses the KJV of having "erroneous renderings" (p. 54).

⁶Norman F. Douty, *Did Christ Die Only for the Elect?* (reprint ed.; Eugene, OR:

misrepresentation is significant for a number of reasons. First, many of the men that Douty cites actually believe what Hunt rejects. For example, Douty claims that both Augustine and John Calvin denied limited atonement, so Hunt's citation of Douty ends up with John Calvin and Augustine supposedly rejecting the very things that Hunt himself says they taught. In other words, Hunt is carelessly and worthlessly citing Douty. Second, contrary to the impression left by Hunt, Douty himself tells us that the aim of his book is to set forth "Moderate Calvinism," and by that he means the kind that "subscribes to only four" of the famous five points.⁷ So, Hunt completely misrepresents both Douty's argument and view on the issue of Calvinism. Third, by citing Douty in this way, Hunt reveals that he does not really understand the issues about which he is writing—he continually confuses the discussion by projecting his own definitions on the writings of others and using documentation in the place of argumentation as if everything is settled by supplying a quote from someone.

This same problem surfaces in Hunt's comments regarding Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Hunt makes the incredible statement that Spurgeon "rejected Limited Atonement" and that "he did so in unequivocal language" (p. 19). Hunt later assures us that "some of what Calvin taught (such as limited atonement) was repugnant to Spurgeon" (p. 35) and goes even so far as to say that Spurgeon "rejected [limited atonement] as heresy" (p. 241). Although Hunt supposedly proves this with a quote from Spurgeon, a simple look at the original source shows that he has misrepresented Spurgeon by omitting words in the middle and at the end of his quotation. Here is the quote from Hunt with the original material from Spurgeon included (and italicized).⁸

I know there are some who think it necessary to their system of theology to limit the merit of the blood of Jesus: if my theological system needed such a limitation, I would cast it to the winds. I cannot, I dare not allow the thought to find a lodging in my mind, it seems so near akin to blasphemy. In Christ's finished work I see an ocean of merit; my plummet finds no bottom, my eye discovers no shore. *There must be sufficient efficacy in the blood of Christ, if God had so willed it, to have saved not only all in this world, but all in ten thousand worlds, had they transgressed*

Wipf and Stock, 1998), p. 136.

⁷Ibid., p. 1.

⁸James White has also pointed out this and other misrepresentations of Spurgeon by Hunt. See "Dave Hunt vs. Charles Haddon Spurgeon: Using Obfuscation to Avoid Admission of Simple and Documented Error," accessed 12 December 2003, available from <http://aomin.org/huntvsspurgeon.html>.

their Maker's law. Once admit infinity into the matter, and limit is out of the question. Having a Divine Person for an offering, it is not consistent to conceive of limited value; bound and measure are terms inapplicable to the Divine sacrifice. *The intent of the Divine purpose fixes the application of the infinite offering, but does not change it into a finite work.*

As the restored portions of this quote make clear, Spurgeon was not arguing for the “extent” of the atonement, as Hunt suggests. Spurgeon was arguing about the “worth” or “value” of the atonement—which is why he can use the words “sufficient efficacy in the blood of Christ, if God had so willed it.” It is unmistakably clear from his own words that Spurgeon did not believe the extent of the atonement was universal. On the next page after the Hunt quote, Spurgeon writes, “To think that my Saviour died for men who were or are in hell, seems a supposition too horrible for me to entertain. To imagine for a moment that He was the Substitute for all the sons of men, and that God, having first punished the Substitute, afterwards punished the sinners themselves, seems to conflict with all my ideas of Divine justice.”⁹

In a similar manner, Hunt alleges that A. H. Strong held to a “non-Calvinist understanding...concerning human responsibility and ability” (p. 110). Quite the contrary, Strong is very clear about his view of total inability: “In opposition to the plenary ability taught by the Pelagians, the gracious ability of the Arminians, and the natural ability of the New School theologians, the Scriptures declare the total inability of the sinner to turn himself to God or to do that which is truly good in God’s sight.”¹⁰ How does Hunt arrive at his conclusion? He bases his claim on a quote in which Strong is clarifying his view of the nature of man’s freedom in light of the fact that he has already asserted total inability. The quote proves nothing of what Hunt intends *if* it is understood as Strong intended it. Strong is countering the unwarranted charge, made by men like Hunt, that belief in total inability turns man into a robot without any freedom or ability to make choices. By missing Strong’s point, Hunt misuses both the source and quote. This misuse may not be deliberate, but rather seems to reflect Hunt’s refusal to listen to the full position articulated by theologians like Strong. Strong makes a concentrated effort to avoid being misunderstood:

Let us repeat, however, that the denial to man of all ability, whether

⁹C. H. Spurgeon *Autobiography: The Early Years* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1962), p. 172.

¹⁰Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1907), p. 640.

natural or moral, to turn himself to God or to do that which is truly good in God's sight, does not imply a denial of man's power to order his external life in many particulars conformably to moral rules, or even to attain the praise of men for virtue. Man has still a range of freedom in acting out his nature, and he may to a certain limited extent act down upon that nature, and modify it, by isolated volitions externally conformed to God's law. He may choose higher or lower forms of selfish action, and may pursue these chosen courses with various degrees of selfish energy. Freedom of choice, within this limit, is by no means incompatible with complete bondage of the will in spiritual things.¹¹

Whether Hunt agrees with Strong's view is not the point; he is obligated to represent Strong's view accurately. Instead of doing that, Hunt uses Strong to defend a position which Strong actually denied!

In a similar way, Hunt misrepresents the view of A. A. Hodge about free will. He claims that "though he was a leading Presbyterian theologian, A. A. Hodge recognized the severe consequences of that extremist view of God's sovereignty: 'Everything is gone if free-will is gone; the moral system is gone if free-will is gone...'" (p. 128). But Hodge did not mean by "free will" what Hunt means. Here we see a problem, identified earlier, surface again in that Hunt does not quote directly from Hodge, but from a quotation of Hodge in D. A. Carson's *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*. This does not excuse Hunt for his misunderstanding of how Hodge is using the term "free-will" since Carson very clearly makes the point that Hodge is using it in the sense that most Calvinists use the term free agency, that is, Hodge is referring to the fact that man is responsible for his choices. Since Hunt does not define the terms being used, he is able to bend quotes to support his position.

Further, Hunt's suggestion that Hodge rejected the view that God's sovereignty encompasses all things is plainly contrary to what Hodge actually believed. In his *Outlines of Theology*, Hodge writes, "Foreordination is an act of the infinitely intelligent, foreknowing, righteous, and benevolent will of God from all eternity *determining* the certain futuration of all events of every class whatsoever that come to pass."¹² Again, whether Hunt agrees with Hodge's view or not is irrelevant, he is still obligated to represent him accurately. This pattern of selectively including quotes from Calvinists in order to bolster his points raises serious questions about the integrity of *WLIT*. The reader who is unfamiliar with the writers that Hunt is quoting is led to

¹¹Ibid., p. 642.

¹²A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (reprint ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), pp. 201–2.

believe that they agree with his position, when, in fact, they stand opposed to it. Hunt would have us believe that they are inconsistent or contradict themselves, but there are at least two other possibilities. Hunt may not understand the material he is quoting or he may be deliberately misrepresenting it. The reader will have to decide which best accounts for this pattern.

It seems clear that at least some of Hunt's misrepresentation of his sources is because he fails to understand them properly. While this may seem like a harsh judgment, it is a judgment supported by clear evidence. When discussing the relationship between regeneration and faith, Hunt introduces a quote by J. I. Packer and suggests that Packer "contradicts his fellow Calvinists (and what he himself says elsewhere)" (p. 99). Specifically, Hunt argues that Packer declares that regeneration follows faith and justification, providing as evidence the following statement from Packer: "God elected men from eternity in order that in due time they might be justified, upon their believing. Their adoption as God's sons follows upon their justification; it is, indeed, no more than the positive outworking of God's justifying sentence" (p. 99). Rather than proving that Packer contradicts himself or other Calvinists, Hunt proves that he does not understand the issue at stake. Not only does Packer not mention regeneration, but nothing he says implies that he believes faith comes before regeneration. Apparently, Hunt believes that Reformed theologians consider justification and/or adoption to be the same as regeneration, but it is precisely at that point he displays his ignorance of what the Reformed view actually teaches. The standard *ordo salutis* places regeneration before faith, while placing justification and adoption after faith. Based on the many examples of such confused thinking on Hunt's part, one might conclude that it is not the Calvinists that contradict themselves, but that Hunt never understood their point in the first place.

That Hunt misrepresents his sources because he fails to understand their point (even if due to carelessness) is further demonstrated through his misuse of one of his favorite writers, Laurence Vance. In attempting to make the case that John Calvin's view of the atonement "seemed to be ambivalent," Hunt includes a quote from John Calvin: "Christ suffered for the sins of the whole world, and in the goodness of God is offered unto all men without distinction, his blood being shed...for the whole human race" (p. 253). Once again, the endnote indicates that Hunt is quoting a secondary source, Augustus Strong's *Systematic Theology* (p. 260). But the same endnote also contains these words, "For proof that this is an authentic quotation, see Vance, *op. cit.*, 467–68." When one turns to Vance for the "proof" referred to by Hunt, one finds something completely different—Vance argues that the quote is spurious! Instead of proving the validity of the quote,

Vance offers this comment:

Almost every writer who cites Calvin's remarks on the passage as proof that he rejected Limited Atonement refers, not to Calvin's commentaries, but to Strong's theology. Strong acquiesces to Richards' opinion that Calvin acceded to the theory of universal atonement in his later years, and then spuriously quotes Calvin on 1 John 2:2. In their zeal to make Calvin a four-point Calvinist, a quote of a quote is all the evidence given. This quotation by Strong is also acknowledged by Calvinists to be spurious.¹³

Hunt cites Vance for proof of his position when in fact Vance is arguing for the very opposite! This is at the very least evidence of extreme carelessness, but more likely demonstrates the fact that Hunt is more interested in quotes than accuracy.

If these were the only examples of misrepresentations found in *WLIT*, perhaps more toleration would be appropriate. After all, no writer is perfect. However, the pattern of manipulated and misused quotes is extensive. Hunt begins with his own ideas then systematically and promiscuously quotes from those who agree and disagree with him without proper regard for what they meant. The result is a book that cannot be read safely without spending hours verifying the accuracy of all of its quotations.

Flaws of Exegetical Commitment and Competence

While it is tempting to enter into a full-fledged interaction with Hunt's biblical arguments related to the most crucial texts in this discussion, that is not our purpose at this point. Rather, it is to demonstrate that the approach Hunt often takes to the handling of Scripture lacks credibility. On one hand, the book is marred by the tendency to make bold assertions about the absence of any teaching on a certain subject rather than actually dealing with the standard texts cited by Calvinists (and others who believe that God is sovereign in all things, including personal salvation). The reader is frequently given the impression that Hunt's opponents simply make up their views since there is no biblical basis for what they believe. For example, he boldly claims that "*The Calvinist cannot produce for any part of TULIP a clear, unambiguous statement from any part of Scripture!* Calvinism must therefore be imposed upon certain texts because it cannot be derived from any" (p. 335, Hunt's emphasis). Given Hunt's pre-commitment, it seems very unlikely that anyone could produce a text that Hunt would not reject as proof.

¹³Vance, "Review," pp. 466–67.

So, instead of exegetical discussions, the reader is confronted with rhetorical arguments about the sinister (or immature, or both) character of John Calvin, the Catholic roots of Calvinism, the offense that such teaching is to our God-given sense of conscience and reason, and so forth. Actual discussion of biblical texts is very limited compared to the continual barrage of rhetoric. *WLIT* is not, in spite of Hunt's claims, a book that examines the biblical teaching on depravity, election, atonement, calling, and perseverance. It really is a collection of Calvinist quotations which Hunt determines to set in the worst possible light and refute by counter-quotes and rhetorical arguments.

In the places where Hunt does interact with the text of Scripture, the result is disheartening since it seems he is determined to deny at almost any cost the Calvinistic understanding of it. His discussion of Acts 13:48 provides a clear illustration of this. The text (in the KJV) states "as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." Hunt contends that all of the major translations have erred by using the word "ordained" (p. 210). He bases this contention on the fact that "many Greek scholars" consider it a "wrong translation," yet he provides no documentation for this assertion. Likewise, he claims that "many Greek experts" believe the idea is that the "Gentiles had disposed themselves (i.e., determined) to believe," but again does not provide any documentation for this assertion. In a book loaded with endnotes, it seems very strange that Hunt provides no documentation for these "expert" references.

Hunt cites the Liddell and Scott lexicon (LSJ) for proof that *tasso* does not mean ordain or foreordain, but does not interact with the standard Greek lexicon for the NT period (BDAG). This is at the least very strange—why use a Greek lexicon designed to provide information on the broader scope of Greek literature instead of the unquestioned, authoritative lexicon of the NT? But more importantly, it also demonstrates a flawed approach. If *tasso* were a rare word, one might concede that the information in LSJ is necessary, but that is not the case.¹⁴ And why is no documentation offered for this reference to LSJ? Beyond that, Hunt's point is rendered moot when one finds that his dictionary of record actually lists a semantic range that includes both "appoint" and "assign to a class"¹⁵ (which is how BDAG takes it in

¹⁴Cf. Darrell Bock's comment, "Only in the case of rarely used words, however, does [LSJ] have significant importance, though the examples may illustrate the force of the term" ("New Testament Word Analysis," in *Introducing New Testament Interpretation*, ed. Scott McKnight [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989], p. 106).

¹⁵LSJ, p. 1470.

Acts 13:48¹⁶). In other words, Hunt again selectively provides information that seems to bolster his case, but the fact is that the very dictionary he cites also lists as possible meanings ones that are contrary to his position.

Hunt tries to draw a parallel with Acts 15:2, where the same word is translated “determined” (KJV/NASB) and, as noted above, argues that it should be given the same meaning here, i.e., “that the Gentiles had disposed themselves (i.e., determined) to believe.” But this argument is flawed. First, in the Acts 15:2 the verb is an aorist active, but in 13:48 it is a perfect passive participle, meaning that the parallel between them breaks down. In 15:2, the agents are active (i.e., “the brethren determined” to do something), but in 13:48 the agents are passive (i.e., something is done to them). Beyond this, the time of the participle in 13:48 indicates that the something done to the agents is in the past, not contemporaneous with the exercise of faith—that is why, for example, the NASB translates it as “had been appointed.” Frankly, Hunt’s alternative reveals a seriously flawed understanding of human depravity—how can unsaved men “dispose themselves to believe”? Furthermore, Hunt misquotes the text in order to make his point. He uses the words “disposed themselves (i.e., determined) *to believe*” when it should be “they disposed themselves (i.e., determined) *to eternal life*.”

It is also informative to notice how Hunt again misuses a quote by A. T. Robertson in order to preserve his case. He does this in two ways. First, in a block quote on p. 211, Hunt inserts an ellipsis to remove words that seem to overturn a portion of his argument (the italicized words are the restored original), “The word ‘ordain’ is not the best translation here. *‘Appointed,’ as Hackett suggests is better.* The Jews had voluntarily rejected the word of God....” There is no other plausible reason for omitting these words than the fact that they call into question Hunt’s interpretation of the phrase. He has made up his mind that the Scriptures cannot teach that God appoints some to salvation, so he selectively chooses and presents the evidence in order to make his case. Second, Hunt leaves the reader with the impression that Robertson does not find this text as support for the Calvinistic view of predestination, but this is not correct. Commenting on the same verse of Scripture, Robertson writes, “By no manner of legerdemain can it be made to mean ‘those who believed were appointed.’ It was saving faith that was exercised only by those who were appointed unto eternal life, who were ranged on the side of eternal life, who were thus revealed as the subjects of God’s grace by the stand that they took on this

¹⁶p. 991.

day for the Lord.”¹⁷ Robertson’s position is contrary to Hunt’s, yet Hunt selectively and manipulatively quotes Robertson to make it seem as if Robertson agrees.

Hunt follows a similar approach when dealing with what Jesus Christ teaches in John 6 about the Father’s drawing of men to salvation. He is very clear about what he believes the text *does not* teach: “It is quite clear that Christ does *not* say that everyone who is drawn will actually come to Him and be saved. That simply is not in the text” (p. 334). Later, on the same page, he adds: “Christ says that no one can come to Him unless the Father draws him. But He doesn’t say (as White and the others quoted above claim) that everyone whom the Father draws actually comes to the Son and is saved.” Hunt argues this in spite of the fact that John 6:44 clearly joins being drawn by the Father to being raised up in the last day—“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.” The personal pronoun “him” refers to the same person—those who are drawn are the same ones that are raised up. In other words, to be drawn in the sense that v. 44 uses it means to be brought to Christ and is parallel in thought to v. 37, “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me.”

How does Hunt avoid this conclusion? After quoting v. 44 he inserts, in brackets, these words: “all who will be raised up have been drawn, but not all who have been drawn will be raised up.” Does he offer any exegetical proof for this assertion? None. Instead, he simply ignores what the verse actually does say in order to make the case that it cannot actually mean that. He does attempt to dodge the force of this verse by arbitrarily driving a wedge between the concepts of being “given” by the Father to the Son (vv. 37, 39) and being “drawn” by the Father (v. 44). While these concepts are different, they are still related to each other—the ones given come to Christ (v. 37) and no one can come unless he is drawn (v. 44). To set them at odds with each other is to abuse the passage and to ignore what Christ says in v. 65, “no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.” Here something is given to the sinner that enables him to come to Christ; it is given to that sinner by the Father; and without it the sinner cannot come to Christ.

Hunt’s approach to v. 65 provides another illustration of his refusal to let the text speak for itself. “Surely it is justifiable to take what He says in verse 65 as at least a *possible* indication of what Christ meant by the Father drawing: i.e., that the Father *gives* the opportunity

¹⁷A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (reprint of 1930 ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, n.d.), 3:200–201.

to come—and we have an abundance of scriptures indicating that this opportunity is given to the whole world through the gospel” (p. 344). Note the shift of argument that he introduces into the Lord’s words—the whole passage has equated “come” with “believe” (a point that even Hunt acknowledges on p. 340), but now Hunt changes it to mean “opportunity to believe” instead of “believe.” His precommitments force him to change definitions in order to preserve his position. Furthermore, changing it to “opportunity to believe” completely destroys the point of the passage. Jesus is confronting those who do not believe in Him (cf. vv. 36, 64). Hunt’s position makes no sense—why tell them that they cannot believe unless God gives them the *opportunity* when Hunt’s whole point is that everyone is given this *opportunity*? The point of vv. 44 and 65 is that man *cannot* come to Christ apart from the enabling work of God; it is not about the lack of opportunity, it is about the lack of ability.

Another example of Hunt’s poor handling of the Scriptures is found in his discussion of Ephesians 1:11, “having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will.” This text would seem to pose a serious challenge to Hunt’s denial of exhaustive sovereignty, but he counters with a series of arguments that demonstrate my point regarding his exegetical and theological competence. First, he makes the assertion that the Greek word translated *works* “doesn’t convey the idea of controlled purpose but of stimulation” (p. 134). Hunt fails to cite the source of this unique definition, but had he consulted the standard Greek lexicon he would have found that it is defined: “to bring about something through use of capability, *work, produce, effect.*”¹⁸ It is granted that the term does not mean “controlled purpose” but one wonders where Hunt got that definition in the first place—who claims that it means that? He seems to create a negative alternative in order to make his suggestion more attractive, but there is no basis for defining this term as only stimulation, as if God does not effectively accomplish His purposes.

In addition to his unique definition of “works,” Hunt also tries to narrow the meaning of “all things” so that it does not mean “all events in the universe but those things purposed in Christ” (p. 135). He offers no proof that this is the case, just the assertion that it is so. Further, he offers no explanation regarding the supposed difference between “all events in the universe” and “those things purposed in Christ.” There is no basis in the text for making this distinction, and the all inclusive language of v. 10 really points in the opposite

¹⁸BDAG, p. 335.

direction. Layton Talbert summarizes the point of v. 11 well: “Paul’s inspired words are as universal in scope and as focused on the ease with which God accomplishes His own pleasure as the psalmists’ [in 103:19; 115:3; 135:6]. ‘All things’ doesn’t leave much out, and ‘according to the counsel of His own will’ is pretty specific.”¹⁹

In the absence of any exegetical evidence, Hunt’s attempt to narrow the meaning of this text gives evidence of reading his view into the text rather than drawing his view from the text. Amazingly, directly after declaring that “all things” means only “those things purposed in Christ,” Hunt proceeds to say, “the eternal ‘counsel’ of His will must have allowed man the freedom to defy His will, or sin would be God’s will” (p. 135). Is the reader now to conclude that sin is part of “those things purposed in Christ”? Apparently, Hunt considers it to be such, but this means that his earlier attempt to narrow it must be discarded.²⁰ Again, we are forced to the conclusion that either Hunt simply does not understand or that he is so driven by his precommitments that he simply buries all contrary evidence.

There is much more that could be said about the kind of exegesis demonstrated by Hunt in *WLIT*, but these examples should serve as sufficient illustration of the problems one encounters when it is read with any level of seriousness. Hunt begins with his conclusions firmly in hand and proceeds to either discard all biblical evidence that seems to contradict his conclusions or to insert ideas so that the text can be squeezed into the pre-determined form. For those committed to the authority of Scripture over our own thoughts, there is much in *WLIT* to be concerned about.

Fallacious Arguments

Since *WLIT* is intended to persuade the reader that the doctrines of Calvinism misrepresent God, it marshals a wide array of arguments to prove its point. As has been noted already, some of the argumentation aims to explain biblical texts differently than the normal Calvinistic interpretation. The book would be greatly improved if this kind of argument was used more often and more carefully. But in addition to the discussion of biblical texts, Hunt uses many arguments that range

¹⁹Layton Talbert, *Not by Chance* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 2001), p. 16.

²⁰This is further confirmed by his words on p. 157, “While God works ‘all things after [according to] the counsel of His own will’ (Ephesians 1:11) this does not prove that God *causes* everything that happens in the universe. It is perfectly compatible with God’s sovereignty for Him to allow man to disobey Him.” This clearly takes the “all things” as “all things that happen in the universe” in spite of what he says on p. 135.

from the simply weak to the completely false. The credibility of the book is damaged greatly by this argumentation.

Poisoning the Well

Perhaps the fallacious argument most commonly used by Hunt is what is popularly known as poisoning the well. This tactic aims to discredit an idea by discrediting its source—if the well is bad, then nothing good can come out of it. The most obvious target for Hunt is John Calvin, but he also seeks to discredit Augustine and Calvinism in general.

His attacks on Calvin range from labeling him as “immature” (p. 40) to raising questions about his conversion (p. 38). In between these poles, the reader is informed that Calvin’s behavior was anything but Christian toward those who disagreed with him (p. 67), Calvin was a poor exegete (p. 341), Calvinism has “surprising Catholic connections” (chapter four), and so forth. Though it comes in varying shades, at its core, this is Hunt’s argument, “How could a man who so outrageously violated the basic teachings of Christ, and who by his treatment of his fellows dishonored his Lord, be looked to as a theological giant by so many evangelicals today?” (p. 312). Again, “If the Calvinists could be so wrong in so much that is so important, might they not be wrong in some basic theological assumptions?” (p. 86).

The fallacy in this argument is that it really argues beside the point. Truth is not determined by who teaches it, but by whether it is found in the Bible. The test of an idea is its conformity (or lack of it) to the Scriptures, not who may have believed or taught it. To follow Hunt’s logic, are we to suspect that the virgin birth is also not true since Calvin, Augustine, and the Catholic Church subscribe to that doctrine as well? If someone wants to have a debate about the rightness or wrongness of Calvin’s leadership in Geneva, that is a legitimate topic to debate. Even if one arrives at the conclusion that he was an ungodly tyrant (as Hunt does), you have settled nothing about whether Calvin was correct about unconditional election. Hunt seems to operate as if Calvin is on a witness stand and his task is to discredit the witness in order to win his case. That may be fine for courtroom dramas, but is not the biblical interpreter’s goal.

Interestingly, Hunt himself provides the counter-argument to his own accusations against Calvin and Augustine. Consider his own words on the subject:

How could Augustine, and Calvin who embraced and passed on many of his major errors, be so wrong on so much and yet be inspired of the Holy Spirit as regards predestination, election, sovereignty, etc.? Sadly, the history of the church, both ancient and modern, includes many prominent Christians who were very godly and of sound doctrine in some

respects while in grave error in others (p. 56).

In addition to using very careless language (“inspired of the Holy Spirit”), Hunt essentially deflates his whole argument! By acknowledging that the same person may be “of sound doctrine in some respects while in grave error in others” he leaves us where we ought to be—examining the person’s doctrine, not slandering the person’s character as if that wins the debate. At the end of the day, it really does not matter what Calvin, Augustine, or anyone else taught on these subjects; what matters is what the Scriptures teach about them.

Straw Men

Another type of fallacious argument that is rampant in *WLIT* is the use of straw men, that is, a writer creating an opponent that can be easily defeated or refuted.²¹ Sadly, this type of argument dominates much of American public discourse where one side of a debate paints a caricature of the other side’s views, then proceeds to attack the weak points of the caricature. These tactics give the appearance of “winning” the argument, but in reality the opponent’s view has never been seriously engaged. One must represent the other position fairly, then refute it; otherwise, one has engaged in straw man tactics.²²

Hunt uses the straw man tactic frequently throughout *WLIT*. For example, he describes the Calvinist position on human will in the following ways: “an extremist view of God’s sovereignty which denied the human will” (p. 40), “an extreme view of God’s sovereignty that denied all power of human choice to man” (p. 63), its view of “God’s sovereignty makes man totally incapable of moral choice” (p. 132), it implies that man’s “will doesn’t even exist” (p. 147), and it denies “that man can will anything of himself” (p. 148). All of these statements misrepresent the position of Hunt’s opponents, who do not, in fact, deny that man has a will or that man must exercise responsible choice. The real questions are whether or not man’s will is enslaved to sin and hostile against God and what are the ramifications of this for our view of how one comes to Christ?

Hunt engages in the same tactic on the subject of God’s sovereignty in relation to man’s sin and salvation. He argues that his opponents believe: “God causes *all* to sin” (p. 42); “If God were not the cause of man’s sin, man would be acting independently of God, and

²¹*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, ed. William Morris (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), p. 1274.

²²Ron Tagliapietra, *Better Thinking and Reasoning* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1995), p. 126.

that cannot be allowed for *anything* in the Calvinist scheme” (p. 128); “man is programmed to respond rather than turning to God willingly with his whole heart” (p. 310); “the elect must be regenerated by God’s sovereign act without the gospel or any persuasion by any preacher” (p. 29); for Calvin “salvation had nothing to do with whether or not a person believed the gospel” (p. 42); and “even if [the non-elect] could understand the message and wanted to believe, it would not be possible because they have been damned from eternity past by an immutable decree of the Almighty” (p. 314). In each of these statements Hunt either imposes his distortions of the position on top of his opponents view or adds a twist to it in order to be make it appear horrible. Most, if not all, Calvinists deny that God is the cause of man’s sin and instead teach that God permitted man to sin (thereby maintaining God’s holiness and man’s responsibility). The Calvinist position does not teach that anyone who understands the gospel and wants to believe will be turned away by God. Likewise, that view does not teach that God saves people without the gospel.²³

Straw man arguments are ineffective simply because they do not prove the point. And for the believer who has the dual obligations to not give “an answer before he hears” (Prov 18:13) and to “speak the truth in love” (Eph 4:15), straw man arguments are more than ineffective, they are sinful.

Either-Or Fallacy

Hunt also utilizes another fallacious argument that sets up two options from the extreme poles as the only two possible options, when in fact there are actually other available options. His most consistent use of this argument relates to how divine sovereignty and human responsibility correlate with each other. His simplistic argument is basically that the reader is faced with “only two choices: either to charge the Infinite God with acting insincerely and in limited love and limited grace, or to admit that Calvinism is in error” (p. 107). In another place, he sets up the poles with these words, “those places in the Bible where it seems to say that God desires all to be saved and is offering salvation to all either to be accepted or rejected cannot really mean what they say and must be interpreted to apply only to the elect” (p. 139).

If these were the only two choices, then Hunt might have a valid argument. But much has been written by Calvinists to articulate the view that one can believe that God is sovereign in the matter of

²³Excluding the discussion of those who die in infancy and those who are mentally incompetent, exceptions for which each view must account.

personal salvation *and* sincere in the offer of the gospel to all.²⁴ Hunt completely ignores these arguments in order to force a choice without exploring all of the options. In the same way, Hunt ignores the possibility that a Calvinist can take the passages which speak of a universal offer of the gospel as being exactly that. By excluding this possibility it distorts the debate so that his position seems to be the obvious choice. This may win over those who, for some reason, do not know or will not consider that there may be other alternatives, but it should not convince any but the uniformed.

Begging the Question

Another fallacious argument used repeatedly by Hunt is called begging the question. Begging the question occurs when an individual assumes something which it “is their responsibility to prove; they build their argument on an undemonstrated claim.”²⁵ Hunt weaves an example of this fallacy throughout his book by his frequent assertion that the Calvinistic understanding of God’s sovereignty denies the concept of “genuine choice.” For instance, Hunt claims that the “basic problem for the Calvinist is a failure to see that God could sovereignly give to man the power of genuine choice” and that there is “no other reason...for disallowing man’s free choice except the fact that to allow it would destroy the very foundations of Calvinism” (p. 128).

There are at least two major problems with Hunt’s accusation. First, he does not define what he means by “genuine choice” and “free choice.” The failure to set forth clear, consistent definitions at this point is a critical flaw, especially since these issues have been debated for centuries and the various views on man’s freedom that have been carefully outlined do not fall into Hunt’s simple either-or categories. Either he is unfamiliar with the details of this discussion or he simply wants to engage in the fallacy discussed above. Hunt can only make this accusation by ignoring (or being uniformed about) the definitions and explanations provided by those who see sovereignty and responsibility as compatible.

Second, and this is the point where he begs the question, Hunt simply assumes that “genuine” choice is what he claims it to be—he offers no proof that he is correct. The end result is that Hunt’s position

²⁴E.g., John Murray, “The Atonement and the Free Offer of the Gospel” in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 1 (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1976), pp. 59–85; see also Iain Murray, *C. H. Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism: The Battle for Gospel Preaching* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1995).

²⁵Daniel McDonald, *The Language of Argument*, 5th ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), p. 88.

carries the weight of opinion, not argument. The closest he comes to offering proof is to base his view on “the commonsense fact that genuine choice is essential if man is to love and obey God or show love and real compassion to his fellows” (p. 66). Along side of common sense, Hunt also appeals to human conscience (pp. 43, 131, 146), human reason and rationality (pp. 112, 131, 139, 162), and experience (pp. 117, 131). However, in each instance, he does not demonstrate precisely how any of these actually prove his point. Again, he simply asserts his opinion without offering evidence or reason for accepting it.

Also, and perhaps crystallizing all these others, Hunt argues that “in His sovereignty, God has so constituted the nature of a gift and of love that man must have the power of choice, or He [*sic*] cannot experience either one from God’s gracious hand” (p. 140). Here the fallacy of Hunt’s argument is fully exposed. He offers no biblical proof for this assertion, but since his common sense, conscience, reason, and experience have convinced him that it is so, it must be so. This is exactly the point of debate, yet Hunt simply assumes that his definition of “genuine choice” is accurate and that without this concept a gift cannot be accepted and love cannot be received or given. Nowhere does Hunt provide a Scriptural statement that gives us this definition or establishes the principle that his concept of freedom is essential to faith, obedience, and love.

The fact is that his concept of freedom is deeply flawed. Hunt argues for what is called contra-causal freedom, that is, genuine freedom must be able to do “the other.” Or, in other words, unless a person is free to choose something to the contrary they are not genuinely free. Hunt simply assumes that this view of freedom and choice is the proper one. In essence he argues that unless a person can choose to either love or not love, obey or not obey, believe or not believe, then that person has no genuine choice and therefore cannot genuinely love, obey, or believe. While it may seem to be the common sense view, this actually runs contrary to what we know from the Scriptures.

Hopefully, all will agree that at some point the redeemed in heaven will no longer have choice (as defined by Hunt) in the matter of loving and obeying God. Hunt acknowledges that God “will eventually create a new universe into which sin can never enter, a universe to be inhabited by all those who have received the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior” (p. 128). This is a problem for Hunt’s view of love—if the redeemed will not have freedom to choose the other (i.e., sin), how can they really love and obey God? If freedom of choice (as defined by Hunt) is necessary to love, then those in heaven cannot love God! This is absurd.

But we do not have to wait until heaven to see the danger of his argument. If saving faith is built on the kind of genuine choice that

Hunt argues for, then it must be the kind of faith that must also be able to be put aside (the choice to the contrary), that is, a person must be free to stop believing. This is the consistent position for someone who believes what Hunt believes about free will, and it should be added that since common sense, conscience, reason, and ordinary experience are the base upon which this view is built, it seems that Hunt would be hard pressed to turn his back on it. If genuine choice necessitates the ability to choose otherwise, then it seems to lead inevitably to a rejection of eternal security.

Hunt does not, however, want to carry his argument out to this conclusion, so he simply rejects the common sense answer. Instead, if his use of sources is any indication, he lands on the middle ground being marked out by men like Zane Hodges, Joseph Dillow, Bob Wilkin, and others of the Grace Evangelical Society. In other words, Hunt seems to side with those who do in fact argue that genuinely saved people can stop believing in Jesus Christ. Yet, the Bible is clear that we are “protected by the power of God *through faith*” (1 Pet 1:5), not without faith. And here is where Hunt lands himself on the horns of his unbiblical definitions of freedom and genuine choice—if he really believes that one must be able to choose the other, then he must believe that a believer can choose to become a non-believer (or else he is robbed of genuine choice, as defined by Hunt).

This is but one example of how Hunt assumes something that it is really his responsibility to prove in the debate about God’s sovereignty in the matter of personal salvation. In the end, this kind of argument not only fails to answer the most important question (is it biblical?); it also leaves the reader with a load of dogmatic assertions rather than biblical evidence.

THE CENTRAL ARGUMENT OF *WHAT LOVE IS THIS?*

WLIT covers a very large doctrinal debate that has existed for centuries and will not be resolved by this book or a review of it. Hunt’s style of writing and theological peculiarities offer many points at which one could lodge complaints against the book, but to do so would take a work as long as the book itself. Instead, I would like to focus on the main point that seems to drive the book, namely Hunt’s contention that the doctrines that he labels Calvinism misrepresent God. The subtitle of the book reveals that this is the central issue for Hunt, and the fact that this theme is woven throughout the book confirms it. Stated directly, Hunt believes that “for God to act as Calvinism teaches would be inconsistent with the repeated assurance in His Word that He is merciful and loving toward *all*” (p. 111).

This is not a minor point for Hunt. Based on his understanding (or lack thereof) of what Calvinism teaches, he concludes that it

blasphemes God (p. 132), presents us with a different God than the God of the Bible (p. 373), and involves God in an immoral scheme (p. 112). These are obviously serious charges with significant ramifications for the souls of people and for fellowship among professing believers, churches, and ministries.

On what does Hunt base these serious allegations? As one can tell from the book's title, the central issue for Hunt comes down to understanding that the doctrines of Calvinism are contrary to what (to use Hunt's arguments) the Bible, reason, and human conscience teach us about God's love. Joined to this argument based on God's love, Hunt adds the concepts of mercy and grace as being incompatible with the Calvinistic understanding of sovereignty, depravity, election, atonement, efficacious grace, and perseverance.²⁶

Although it is stated many different ways and various sub-themes are added to it, the basic argument is set forth by Hunt in these words: "Here we confront a major problem with Calvinism: its denial of God's infinite love for all. That God would choose to save only a select few and leave the rest to suffer eternal damnation would be contrary to His very nature of infinite love and mercy as the Bible presents Him..." (p. 100). Based on the recommendations the book has and is receiving, it seems that Hunt's argument has appeal for some who consider Calvinistic teaching dangerous. But Hunt has chosen a flawed approach for making his case, and he also opens the door to very serious errors on important doctrinal truths.

A Flawed Approach

The manner in which Hunt develops his central argument is fundamentally flawed. At the heart of it, Hunt has turned his own definition of God's character into the controlling principle of his hermeneutic. Any text that contradicts *his understanding* of God's love and mercy must be reinterpreted to fit his predetermined view. Obviously, all legitimate interpretation of the Scriptures must interpret the parts in light of the whole, but Hunt imposes his grid on to the Scriptures rather than deriving it from them. Bible students and theologians have acknowledged for centuries that the biblical information regarding God's sovereignty and man's responsibility involves a certain element of mystery for us as finite beings, yet Hunt rejects this concept

²⁶Perhaps it is necessary to note here that there are many variations of the "Calvinistic" understanding of these subjects. While Hunt acknowledges this several times, he still conveniently lumps all "Calvinists" together in his explanations and refutations. This is the almost inevitable result of making the book about Calvinists and Calvinism rather than about what the Bible teaches on these important subjects.

(e.g., pp. 28–29). His rejection reveals the flaw in his methodology—rather than let the full biblical presentation inform us about God’s character, Hunt only accepts those portions which fit with his definition of “genuine choice” and free will. In the end, this results in a different controlling principle than God’s character; it actually elevates Hunt’s view of man’s character to the final authority in this debate.

That this is true is confirmed by Hunt’s continual appeals to conscience, common sense, reason, human sense of right and wrong, and experience. While there may be some very limited role in biblical interpretation for these things, Hunt appeals to them so often and bases so much of his argument on them that they function as his interpretative grid. In other words, if the text seems to indicate something contrary to our “God-given sense of conscience” then we must look for another alternative. What Hunt seems unwilling to consider is that all these things (conscience, human reason, common sense) have been adversely affected by sin and may not be functioning properly at all! The Bible is the final authority, not our sense of right and wrong or perception of what we think God’s character should be.

Frankly, this aspect of Hunt’s book (and its seeming popularity) is alarming. The approach which he uses is the same one that has consistently led toward modernism because it essentially makes man the measure of truth—if it is contrary to our sense of justice or perception of God, then reinterpret, redefine, or reject it. This is precisely the method currently being used on many fronts to reshape Christian thinking about biblical teaching. For instance, Clark Pinnock has used the same rationale to develop a theory which provides for a post-mortem encounter between Jesus Christ and those who have never heard the gospel. He writes:

The logic behind a postmortem encounter with Christ is simple enough. It rests on the insight that God, since he loves humanity, would not send anyone to hell without first ascertaining what their response would have been to his grace. Since everyone eventually dies and comes face to face with the risen Lord that would seem to be the obvious time to discover their answer to God’s call.²⁷

Eternal, conscious punishment meets the same fate under this hermeneutic: “I was led to question the traditional belief in everlasting conscious torment because of moral revulsion and broader theological considerations, not first of all on scriptural grounds. It just does not make any sense to say that a God of love will torture people forever for

²⁷*A Wideness in God’s Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), pp. 168–69.

sins done in the context of a finite life.... It is time for evangelicals to come out and say that the biblical and morally appropriate doctrine of hell is annihilation, not everlasting torment.”²⁸ Note the path which the argument follows: “any sense...God of love...morally appropriate.”²⁹

Let us be clear about the objection. I am not saying that Hunt is teaching the same thing that Pinnock teaches or even that Hunt will end up where Pinnock has wandered. But it does seem very clear that Hunt is using the same flawed approach that Pinnock and others have embraced, namely elevating *man's* sense of right and wrong and perceptions of God to the controlling principle of interpretation. This is plainly wrong.

Dangerous Results

The specific argument that Hunt utilizes is worse than simply being based on a flawed methodology. It is a distortion of what the Bible actually teaches about God's love and mercy. Hunt carelessly moves from the true statement that “all of God's qualities are infinite and perfectly balanced” to the false conclusion that God's love, mercy and grace cannot be limited toward any (p. 113). Turning it to an accusation, Hunt insists that the “Calvinist God...limits His grace and mercy” (p. 324). And the argument goes even further, for Hunt believes that God must do all that He can do or else He fails to demonstrate that He is the God of infinite love (p. 152).

The plain fact is that Hunt's claim is either not true or it is completely irrelevant in terms of his basic point. How can Hunt seriously argue that God displays His love, mercy, and grace *infinitely toward all*? By anyone's definition, *infinite* must mean without limitation, so is Hunt really suggesting that God's love, mercy and grace are directed toward those in hell in the same way that they are directed toward those in heaven? If there is no difference, then Hunt's point is meaningless because he cannot use it to deny any special work of grace. This is another absurdity.

Furthermore, Hunt seems unable to see that the Bible clearly places conditions on God's mercy and grace. For example, Hunt quotes Psalm 86:5 and Ezra 8:22 as support for his view that God is “not only good to a few but to all” while, in fact, these two verses

²⁸Quoted in John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), p. 116.

²⁹This same approach is being used to argue for other issues including the feminization of ministry, homosexuality, and open theism.

clearly state that the promises apply to all those that “call upon thee” and “seek him.” The fact is that God can be infinite in His character and still be free to dispense His mercy and grace conditionally. I doubt that Hunt truly denies this point, but he seems unable to see that this very point refutes his basic premise. If Hunt concedes that God is free to withhold mercy from sinners (and he does admit this [pp. 206, 209]), then he must concede that his argument about the *infinite* nature of God’s mercy is a moot point.

The consequences of Hunt’s logic can be illustrated in the way that Clark Pinnock utilizes it to argue for his theory of a post-mortem encounter:

Why should we think that there will be grace for the unevangelized [who have died]? The reason to think so lies in the simple fact that God does not cease to be gracious to sinners just because they are no longer living. The God that sinners meet after death remains the same One who sent his Son to die for the sins of the world. Jesus, who was the friend of sinners, has not suddenly become their enemy after death. God has not abruptly ceased to desire the salvation of sinners, or that they come to a knowledge of the truth. Surely, the God who loves the world will always love it, even loving those who reject the gift of his love. If God is the gracious God of the Gospel, we know that wherever God is, there grace is. Therefore, when humanity stands before God, they stand before a God of mercy and love.³⁰

Again, I am sure that Hunt would not agree with Pinnock’s conclusions, but they are both making a twisted theological argument from a distorted picture of God’s character. They both take only a portion of the biblical witness about God’s character while ignoring biblical statements like, “You hate all who do iniquity” (Ps 5:5). They both also make the mistake of blurring the distinction between who God is and how He relates to His creation. That God withholds mercy from those who have defied Him in no way threatens His character. But once you start with the presuppositions by which Hunt and Pinnock operate, it leads to very dangerous conclusions. Hunt may not be where Pinnock is now, but neither was Pinnock when he started down that path. When Hunt boldly declares that “surely there can be no limit to the infinite mercy of the infinite God” (p. 214), he is perilously close to the same forbidden pathway.

At its root, Hunt’s whole argument is an example of special pleading in that he twists the definitions of love, mercy, and grace into whatever form best fits his point and/or discredits his opponent’s

³⁰Pinnock, *A Wideness in God’s Mercy*, p. 170.

point. Because the Calvinist restricts *redeeming* love, mercy, and grace to the elect, Hunt argues that the Calvinist does not believe that God has any love, mercy, or grace for all of humanity. But this kind of argument does not prove anything because it fails to distinguish between apples and oranges. As argued above, it is doubtful that Hunt truly believes that God loves an unbeliever in the same exact manner that He loves the believer. If Hunt acknowledges this difference, then his whole argument falls to the ground.

But Hunt seems obligated to acknowledge the biblical evidence that God's love is not universally bland; it differentiates between its objects. God loved Israel in a way that He did not love the other nations (cf. Deut 7:7–8; 10:14–15). What else could it mean when Jesus said that “if anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him” (John 14:23)? This has to mean that the Father will love those who love Jesus and keep His word in a way different than those who do not love Jesus and do not keep His word. So, God can still “love the world” (John 3:16) while having a different kind of love for those who love Jesus Christ. If this is not true, in what way would a believer find comfort in the promise that nothing “can separate us from the love of God” (Rom 8:39)? If both believer and unbeliever are *equally* the object of God's love *in the exact same manner*, then what does this text mean? Obviously, they are not, and Hunt's argument fails to account for this.

Perhaps it is this unbending determination to argue his main thesis that leads Hunt to some of the dangerous positions espoused in *WLIT*. For sake of time, we will only examine two of them, but they are very significant theological issues. The first concerns Hunt's view of Christ's atonement. In his efforts to refute limited atonement, Hunt offers a solution which is no less problematic, namely that since Christ atoned for mankind's sins “no one will spend eternity in the lake of fire because of his sins; they will be there for rejecting Christ and the salvation He obtained and freely offers to all” (p. 248). Hunt offers no biblical basis for this view, simply the assertion that this answers the supposed problem of double jeopardy. For Hunt, the only reason people will be punished in hell is because they rejected Christ, which he equates with the unpardonable sin (p. 250). Again, he does not demonstrate from the Scriptures that this is so, but simply expects the reader to accept his assertion.³¹

³¹This reference to the blasphemy against the Spirit provides another illustration of the sloppy exegesis that Hunt uses to justify his assertions. On p. 256 he joins the ideas of rejecting Christ “in spite of the conviction of all by the Holy Spirit” in John 16:8–11 and the blasphemy against the Spirit mentioned in Matt 12:31–32. Hunt does not seem to consider that the text in John refers to the post-Pentecost ministry of

By arguing this, Hunt clearly contradicts the biblical teaching regarding degrees of punishment, namely, that eternal punishment will not all be of the same severity. The Lord Jesus Christ warned the people of Capernaum that it “will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment” than for them (Matt 11:24). The Scriptures also inform us that those who stand before the Great White Throne will be judged “according to their deeds” (Rev 20:13; cf. Rom 2:5–6).

Hunt not only puts forward an unbiblical view, he contradicts himself in the process. Just prior to telling us that “as a result of Christ’s death having paid the full penalty,” he states that the atonement is not “automatically credited to the account of anyone who does not acknowledge his guilt before God, repent and accept Christ as his Savior” (p. 248). So, here we find him arguing simultaneously that: (1) the benefits of Christ’s atonement are not credited apart from repentance and faith, and (2) no unbelievers will be punished eternally for their sins since Christ paid for them. These cannot both be true. Either unbelievers are punished for their sins or the benefits of the atonement are credited to them apart from repentance and faith.

Another major problem generated by Hunt’s dogged determination to press his view of God’s character upon the Scriptures centers on the biblical teaching regarding man’s depravity. Hunt contends that “the only way...to defend God’s integrity, love and compassion in a world filled with sin and suffering is to acknowledge that He has granted to man the power to choose for himself” (p. 128). Left as it stands, this statement is not that problematic, but when Hunt moves to define what “the power to choose for himself” actually means, the problems become apparent. Hunt’s view of contra-causal freedom has already been addressed, but we have not considered the ramifications of this view for his doctrine of depravity and the reception of salvation.

Although he denies it at points, his basic position is that unaided natural man can of his own free will come to Christ for salvation. For example, Hunt writes, “it would be reasonable to conclude from God’s many commands and appeals to reason and obedience that man must be capable of a willing response” (pp. 180–81). That this is the same approach that Pelagius used to develop his doctrine ought to cause us great concern,³² but perhaps it would be better to speak of Hunt’s view

the Spirit (cf. John 16:8 “when He comes”), but the historical situation that Jesus addresses is connected with his miracles and the accusation that He was demon-possessed. What is clearly implied in the Matthew account is made explicit in Mark’s gospel, “because they were saying, ‘He has an unclean spirit’” (Mark 3:30).

³²Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), pp. 50–51.

as being closer to Semi-Pelagianism. He does speak of God's grace, but even then he compares it to the grace necessary to breathe, which means that it is not a grace that affects man's moral depravity (p. 181). Hunt's view of the will's operation seems beyond Arminianism since he gives the human will complete autonomy—"No one, however, is made willing against his will but must have been willing to be made willing" (p. 183). This is worse than confusing language; it is confused theology. In the final analysis, although he may be well intentioned, his efforts to defend God's character result in man's will being co-sovereign with God's.

Based on his argument, it seems impossible to even hold to the doctrine of prevenient grace since man's will would have to accept grace or it would cease, according to Hunt, to be grace. He claims "it would be the very opposite of grace to force any gift or benefit of 'grace' upon anyone who did not want to receive it" (p. 291). So, Hunt ties God's hands so that He cannot bestow any grace without man's consent, yet somehow has man able to respond to the gospel. That can only mean that man has this capability within himself apart from God's grace. At least the Arminian position is willing to admit that unsaved man must have God's grace before he is able to make a decision for Christ. For instance, Wiley, an Arminian theologian, indicates the need for God's grace to precede any ability in man to respond to the gospel:

Prevenient grace, as the term implies, is that grace which 'goes before' or prepares the soul for entrance into the initial state of salvation. It is the preparatory grace of the Holy Spirit exercised toward man helpless in sin. As it respects the guilty, it may be considered mercy; as it respects the impotent, it is enabling power. It may be defined, therefore, as that manifestation of the divine influence which precedes the full regenerate life.³³

Notice that Wiley describes man as "helpless in sin" and that prevenient grace "as it respects the impotent" is "enabling power." So, when Hunt denies that man is without ability to come to Christ or seek Christ, he is rejecting both the Calvinistic and Arminian understandings of depravity.

This might be acceptable if Hunt was offering a better, more biblical alternative than these two historic views, but he is not. Instead, he offers a strange and contradictory answer based on his own reasoning, not biblical evidence. Hunt makes the odd claim that receiving the gift

³³H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, vol. 2 (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1945), pp. 345–46.

of salvation requires no ability: “What ability of any kind is required to receive a gift? None, of course. Then how can any sinner suffer from an inability to receive the free gift of eternal life?” (p. 97). This is truly an incredible position, especially in light of his own descriptions of what it does take to receive the gift of salvation. For example, later in the book he says that “man must be capable of a willing response” (p. 181), that man responds to the gospel “by intelligent choice” (p. 103), and that by “its very nature a gift must be received by an act of the will” (p. 139). Does this mean that “intelligent choice” requires no “ability”? Are we really supposed to believe that “an act of the will” involves no “ability”? His clear self-contradictions are even more direct: “Salvation is the gift of God’s love offered to whosoever will believe. How could a gift be received and love returned without the ability to choose? The ability to say no—which is all Calvinism grants to the totally depraved—is meaningless without the accompanying ability to say yes” (p. 290). In clear contradiction to his earlier argument that it requires no ability to receive a gift, here he argues that one must have “the ability to choose.”

Perhaps it is apparent by now that reading this book takes one into a world where words can be bent into whatever shape one desires. On one hand, Hunt can deny man’s total inability by denying that it takes any ability to receive a gift. And, on the other hand, he can promote the concept of free will by arguing that the ability to say no means there must be ability to say yes. This is normally described as “having your cake and eating it too”!

Hunt’s verbal and doctrinal gymnastics serve to highlight the fundamental problem with his views of depravity and free will. Because he wants man to retain absolute freedom of will, he must somehow restrict the effects of sin so as to keep them away from the will. That results in the notion that it takes no ability to receive a gift—a notion, by the way, that he does not bother to support from Scripture, he only says that it is so. But does his view actually make any sense? Not at all.

This point can be seen simply by using his descriptions of receiving the gift of salvation. Suppose a telemarketer calls you on the phone during dinner and offers you a free trip to Hawaii for one week with all expenses paid, no strings attached—he will even give you \$500 for accepting! Hunt says we need to make an “intelligent choice” about accepting or rejecting that gift, so we start to think about the gift offered to us. Do you think your past experience with telemarketers will have any effect on your thinking? Do you think your evaluation of the sales approach will affect your choice? Obviously these things will, and that is exactly the problem for Hunt’s view. The problem is two-fold: (1) “intelligent choice” is the exercise of the mind’s ability to assess options; and (2) one’s mind is influenced by its disposition toward any

number of the factors in this illustration. Were we having a bad day? Do we like or dislike telemarketers? Do we have any interest in traveling to Hawaii? Do we trust phone solicitors? You get the point—the evaluation of any offer is a composite of mental and emotional issues.

And the reality of this applies to the offer of the gospel and the gift of salvation. The Bible is absolutely clear that the mind is unable to accept the things of God due to ignorance (Eph 4:18) and being convinced that they are foolish (1 Cor 2:14); in fact, the unsaved mind is hostile against God (Rom 8:6–8)—to tie it to the illustration, it hates telemarketers so it never gives them the time of day! This is the difference between the inability that is taught in the Scriptures and the caricature that Dave Hunt tries to deny is taught there. And the problem is compounded for Hunt since he argues that the mind of man cannot be made willing against his will, so he actually sets aside the often-made argument that the gospel and the ministry of the Spirit restores man's ability to choose. That is why it seems necessary to say that Hunt's view of depravity is at least Semi-Pelagian.

CONCLUSION

Whether one accepts or rejects the Calvinistic understanding of God's sovereignty and soteriology, *WLIT* should be rejected because it is very poorly researched and written, and, more importantly, it opens the door to very dangerous conclusions that are more representative of the current move to Open Theism than biblical Christianity. As someone who is convinced that God does control all things, that man is unable to come to Christ apart from the gracious enabling of God, that Christ died to supply an infinitely valuable atonement that is effectively applied to all who trust in Him, that God works effectively to bring sinners to repentance and faith, and that all who have trusted Christ will persevere in the faith until final glorification; I find the teachings of this book to be both unbiblical and inflammatory. Hunt boldly declares that my understanding of the Bible blasphemes God, involves God in an immoral scheme, and a whole host of other accusations. To the contrary, Dave Hunt has mishandled the Scriptures and attempted to squeeze God into a mold formed by his sense of right and wrong.

The book is not worth the time it takes to wade through it, and writing a review article about it would not be worth the effort if it were not for the fact that this book is being recommended as a profitable guide to this theological discussion. The popularity of this book and the recommendations it has received are a cause of great concern to me.

From a fundamentalist perspective, the debate between the Calvinistic and Arminian positions has not historically been a cause for

breaking fellowship. But that will not last if Hunt is allowed to throw down the gauntlet with rhetoric like this, “The issue we have been dealing with is very simple: Which God is the biblical One—the God of Calvinism, or the God of love who is not willing that any perish, but has given them the right to choose?” (p. 373). Further he writes, “That attitude is only the logical reflection of the ‘God’ they believe in and follow, a God who takes pleasure in damning billions. In defense of God’s true character, it must be insisted again that such is *not* the God of the Bible” (p. 349). Not only does Hunt dishonestly distort the position with such rhetoric, he literally calls into question the genuineness of his opponents’ faith. This kind of charge cannot go unanswered and will lead inevitably to division. Perhaps that is necessary (Hunt and some of those who recommend his book seem to think so), but it will be a new development among fundamentalists.

As a seminary president, my interactions with college and seminary students have revealed a growing disenchantment with the knee-jerk reaction against Calvinism that Hunt’s book represents and the misinformed recommendations it is receiving. Those who have read the men that Hunt quotes know that he is not presenting their views accurately. Rather than offset the growing tide of Calvinism, Hunt’s book will only cause serious students to run from his shallow and deceptive approach, and it will discredit those recommending it.

From a pastoral perspective, the charge that belief in God’s sovereignty in the matter of salvation destroys evangelistic zeal is baseless. The history of missions and revival stands opposed to such arguments. Men like Edwards, Whitefield, Carey, Fuller, Judson, and Nettleton were part of the greatest movements in modern history, and all were committed Calvinists. All genuine Calvinists stand opposed to a pseudo-Calvinism that denies man’s responsibility and deadens evangelistic zeal. What the contemporary church, both fundamental and evangelical, really needs to fear is the man-centeredness of too much ministry philosophy, not the belief that man is helpless apart from the saving grace of God.

Dave Hunt’s book indicates a shift in our concept of authority, and it is a shift in the wrong direction. Hunt wants to deny that God is completely in control in order not to offend our sense of reason and conscience. Rather than exalt man’s mind above God’s revelation, we must bend the knee to the authority of God’s Word—even if it leaves us uncomfortable with certain conclusions or unable to fully comprehend the outworking of it all. Sadly, Dave Hunt’s position is not new; it has dominated much of American church life for the last century and a half. It seems to me that our real hope for revival is that this domination will finally be broken and the powerful truths of the Great Awakening will rise again to the forefront of the church’s attention.