



Geisler, Norman.

Chosen But Free, Second Edition

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

New Jersey

Norman Geisler is without a doubt one of the most prolific writers of the modern age having authored or co-authored more than 60 books. As an apologist he's top notch but good apologetics doesn't always equate to good theology.

Chosen But Free (hereafter CBF) seeks to present a 'Balanced View of Divine Election' while avoiding what Geisler calls 'extreme-Calvinism' and 'extreme-Arminianism.' Geisler dubs himself a 'moderate-Calvinist' which as far as this reviewer can tell equates to nothing more than a conglomeration of Calvinism and Arminianism. The book begins by presenting the Biblical foundation for the sovereignty of God by highlighting God's essential attributes and functions such as: eternity/timelessness, his role as Creator and Sustainer, transcendence, omniscience, omnipotence, etc. He then goes on to note that due to God's sovereignty, He even controls our free choices.

But this seeming contradiction is explained in that God in his divine foreknowledge has orchestrated history according to human choices. In a nut shell, God didn't make anyone do anything against their wills, hence they are responsible, but God used their choices to accomplish his purposes. He rejects the 'extreme-Calvinist' caricature against the Arminian view of election that God somehow looked down the halls of time and purposed his plan according to what he knew humans would do. On the contrary, Geisler asserts that "...if God is an eternal and simple Being, then His thoughts must be eternally coordinate and unified...whatever God fore-chooses cannot be based on what he foreknows. Nor can what he foreknows be based on what he forechose. Both must be simultaneous, eternal, and coordinate acts of God." (53) This does seem an adequate answer to the problem at hand.

The book falls apart for me in the next few chapters (*Avoiding Extreme Calvinism, Avoiding Extreme Calvinism cont., Avoiding Extreme Arminianism*) in that he represents what is commonly understood to be Classical 5 Point Calvinism as 'extreme.' Geisler does not use the term 'hyper' because he recognizes that Hyper-Calvinism is different

from what he terms 'extreme' (215-16). He also labels Neo-Theism 'extreme Arminianism' in what seems to be an attempt to distance himself from Arminianism. From my summation Geisler is more in line with Classical Arminianism than he is with Calvinism in any of its forms. I see these three chapters as nothing more than an attempt to give credence to this mixed theology that he calls 'moderate Calvinism.' Both parties, Calvinists and Arminians alike were misrepresented in the most obvious ways.

I believe that the Calvinist/Arminian dichotomy has deceived many Christians into believing that they must fall into one of the two groups in order to have any kind of coherent theology. Geisler seems no different in that he wants to hold the label of 'Calvinist' while not actually believing what Calvinists believe, or more properly claiming to believe what Calvinists believe in a 'moderate way'.

In the 7th chapter entitled A Plea for Moderation, Geisler presents a defense of 'eternal security' which is reminiscent of Charles Stanley. This is one of the most glaring inconsistencies in this position of 'moderate Calvinism' in that it is not based in an eternal decree of election which the Calvinist believes occurred before the foundation of the world. While not a Calvinist, I understand that Perseverance of the Saints is a doctrine that fits snugly into the framework of Calvinism, being rooted in their doctrines of Election and Predestination. But Geisler's doctrine of eternal security has no such foundation in that he holds to free will. It does not follow that one is free to believe while dead in sin but once regenerated is not free to cease believing.

In response to this type of argumentation Geisler says, "*Some decisions in life are one-way with no possibility of reversing them: suicide for example... by this same logic the Arminian would have to argue that we can be lost even after we get to heaven. But if we are still free in heaven and yet cannot be lost, then why is it logically impossible for us to be free on earth and yet never lose our salvation?*" (127) Geisler assumes facts not in evidence, namely that we will be free in heaven. The Bible is simply silent on this issue and as Geisler well knows (holding a PhD in philosophy), silence proves silence. And the analogy between suicide and apostasy is faulty in that once a person kills themselves they have no means by which to make any choices, but once a person is regenerated they still have their faculty of reason. And it would seem a fitting analogy in the context of Hebrews 6:4-6 which speaks of the impossibility of repentance to those who reject God after having known him. Perhaps we *could* view apostasy as spiritual suicide.

Geisler offers quite a few appendices some of which seem irrelevant such as Great Christian Church Fathers on Free Will. In this appendix he lists quite a few quotes from early fathers in order to support the belief in free will in the early Church, but this only proves that the belief existed, not that it is Biblical. A similar argument could be put forth for infant baptism or inclusion of the deuterocanon into the canon of scripture, but Geisler would reject both claims. For a subject such as this the God-Breathed Scriptures should be the main source of authority.

The appendix asking the question Was Calvin a Calvinist? seems out of place. It is clear that Calvin was a Calvinist and the system that bears his name is in line with the full body

of his work. But Calvin like any other man is subject to inconsistency and yes, even the occasional change of thought on any given subject. This being the case it would not be a surprise that some of his writings could be used to assert that he believed one thing or another. I believe that Geisler has taken Calvin out of context and used him in a way that he would have never approved of.

Geisler does well in defending faith being a gift given to more than the elect alone as well as the doctrine of Unlimited Atonement. He even points out something that I have oft noticed which is when dealing with a passage such as John 1:29 or 1John 2:2 the Calvinist will *“cite passages (like Luke 2:1-2) from another book, in another context, used in a geographical (not a redemptive) sense in a futile attempt to prove their point.”* (201)

Geisler concludes this 2nd edition of CBF with a response to James White’s *The Potter’s Freedom*, documenting what he claims were an abundance of logical fallacies on the part of White. Having never read TPF I can’t comment on whether or not the appendix was correct in its summation, but I have read White’s response¹ in which he speculates that this appendix may have not been the work of Geisler but perhaps a class of graduate students. I’ll have to pick up TPF and compare notes.

All in all, CBF is a book that gets one thinking which I feel is a good thing. But from a theological perspective I think that Geisler has come up short. I don’t see his moderate view as a better alternative to the Calvinist/Arminian dichotomy in that it is inconsistent within itself. At least these systems are logically consistent for better or worse. I would recommend CBF to the reader interested in simply getting another view on the election issue. It has its strong points (e.g. the Biblical defense of Unlimited Atonement) and its weak points (i.e. the caricatures of both Classical Calvinism as being ‘extreme’ and Neo-Theism as being Arminianism).

¹ <http://aomin.org/CBFRep2.html>