

The "Straw Man"



Often Calvin and the adherents to his theology seem to be arguing against a "straw-man" construction of a "freewill" based position. This does great violence in misdirecting their arguments and building up zealous wrath against a position, which while despicable, is not really believed by anybody.

This author does not personally hold to this "straw-man" view, and no individual or denomination can be called to remembrance who would accept this easily dismissed view. The misunderstanding that associates all opposing views with this "straw-man" has corollary misconceptions. Both are included below.

The following points make up an extreme freewill based "straw-man" theology, which are often erroneously associated to anyone who would oppose Calvinism:

1. Man 100% meritoriously earns his salvation through works by his own freewill
2. Man discovers and achieves salvation apart from God's will and/or awareness.
3. Man cannot become morally depraved, much less be born as such.
4. God in no way predestined or foreknew who would be saved.

This straw man is constructed because of the following corollaries that exists in the mind of some Calvinists. These corollaries represent extreme dilemmas that fail to recognize a third alternative to Calvinism and the straw-man:

1. Either only God works *or* man works, but not both. It is grace versus works, with no possibility of grace *and* works - conditional works.
2. If man is able to recognize his plight when presented with the gospel, then His intelligence rivals that of God, Who created him and extended salvation unto Him.
3. If man ever becomes morally depraved, then he must become so *instantly and irreversibly*. The heart becomes hardened to the extent that only the direct working of the Spirit on the heart can undo the damage.
4. The *only possible* basis for God's predestination of man unto salvation is limited to election by named individual, apart from anything relating to the individual.

An alternative to the "straw-man" and the Calvinistic viewpoint is outlined as follows:

1. A third alternative: God works *and* man works. God's work is primary, necessary, gracious, and justifying. Man's work is reactionary, conditional, required by God, grateful, and evidentiary. There is no "either-or" dilemma but a complimentary harmony.
2. Although man may recognize something is amiss by his conscience or the consequences of sin, he could have never formulated or executed the plan that God revealed. Without God's direction, man's intelligence would have vainly floundered in misery, but with God's revelation, man may initially appreciate some basic aspects of this mystery and accept the rest in faith. Ever growing, man continues to learn from God, he but may only fully understand the mystery when in eternity with God.
3. Moral depravity is real and gravely dangerous; however, it only happens after repeatedly sinning, stubbornly ignoring and searing the conscience. The rate of this process depends on the will of the person. When ultimately completed, it is irreversible, because nothing is left that wants it to be reversed. Until completed, it may be undone and reversed by exposure to the gospel, which is delivered, empowered, and sustained by the Holy Spirit.
4. There are multiple, possible bases of predestination and foreknowledge towards salvation. The Bible doctrine of predestination is according to a type, class, or body of people. This body is defined as those "in Christ", and entry into it depends on one's willingness to be added to this body. Only a certain type will respond to the call. The message, messenger, and, consequently, type of person to respond, were determined before time began - predestined and foreknown

Recognizing the discontinuity between with what a person may think he is disagreeing and with what he is really disagreeing is a key step toward recognition of the truth. Secondly recognizing the full body of possible interpretations is also essential. Eliminating any option, possibly the correct one, makes proper discernment of truth dangerous at best.