

# Forum:

## Controversial Discussion concerning the BRF / PRC position on:

1. Same Repentance for both Elect and Reprobate?
2. The BRF and logic.
3. Common grace.
4. Gospel "call" v. Gospel "offer"

The following letter was sent to the editor by BRF member Mr. Marc Punford, of Shrewsbury, who is a post-graduate research student in Philosophy at the University of Stafford. Mr. Punford is in general very appreciative of the work of the BRF, but has raised some critical comments concerning our positions on certain important and vital doctrines, which comments he herewith prosecutes with the usual vigorous polemic style of a University philosopher! The reader should not be put off by this, as his purpose is purely exploratory, seeking clarification. It is a long letter, therefore we present herewith the first installment of three paragraphs interspersed with the editor's responses. Further installments we hope (DV) to publish in future issues of the Journal.

Dear Former Chairman,(James North), Editor, Pastor Hanko, and officers of the committee, I do tender my grateful thanks to you all for kindly publishing my previous letter in the pages of *The British Reformed Journal*, and for the kind consideration of, and response to, my (former) letter, (proffered by the editor, Mr Hugh Williams, in BRJ No. 13 Jan.- March 1996).

You will perhaps, be not altogether surprised to learn that I found (your) reply (to that first letter) somewhat inadequate; I do of course appreciate that this is largely due to the constraints imposed by space shortage. I wondered if I might not be permitted to attempt a further degree of clarification, unto, I hope, our mutual benefit; unto which end I herewith put forward the following:

**Firstly**, as to the promiscuity of the preaching of which you speak, with the afore mentioned, I have no argument; the responsibility of the sinner, we both agree, is not reduced by virtue of his inability; nevertheless, whether the reprobate sinner is required to repent under a law which he cannot obey, rather than unto a gospel not designed to meet his needs as a reprobate, remains a question begged as far as the reply you have given is concerned. Giving the seeming near obsession of the B.R.F. with the Aristotelian laws of logic, one would have supposed that they would regard as an unacceptable contradiction that interpretation of the scripture which would class the repentance required of the non elect to be identical with that of the elect, since the gospel, on their own admission, in its redemptive aspect, is limited to the elect alone who are not judged by that condemnatory law by reason of which the reprobate are found guilty, since even the elect cannot produce, the gift of faith

given to them, nor yet that repentance unto life the which they alone are granted, the reprobate are surely responsible to produce legal repentance and non saving faith in God as revealed in the law, rather than a saving faith which even Adam in paradise could not have produced as an unfallen creature prior to the fall through perfect behaviour.

### Editor's Response:

First, Mr. Punford and I agree on this: A sinner's inability to repent in no way eviscerates his responsibility to do so. Such inability the sinner took on himself voluntarily in Adam's first sin: "in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt *surely die*" (Gen. 2 : 17). Now, in the gospel, the repentance God requires of sinners is given to the Elect only through the Holy Spirit's applying to us the benefits of the Redemption purchased by Christ. (Cf. Shorter Catech. 29-31). Thus, in the case of the Elect, their inability is taken away by the work of the Spirit within. But what of the non-elect, are they required, by the Divine command, like the Elect, to produce the same repentance? Or does God only expect and demand of them a kind of "grade 2" repentance, and a "grade 2" faith, all non-saving of course, being a repentance of a legal kind with reference to the law, as something separate from the Gospel?

I have to say I see no evidence in Scripture for this. Scripture teaches that all men have sinned the same sin in Adam, which was the fundamental breach of what Westminster theologians call "the Covenant of Works". All mankind, descending from Adam by ordinary generation, are under the same responsibility and liability. That is, to answer to the demands of this Covenant which they have broken in Adam. Hence, the repentance demanded of all men must be the same, for all men are all in the same condition. God cannot demand any less from anyone, to do so would entail Him in ignoring at least some sin. And He cannot demand any more from anyone, as there is no more to demand, that is, that a man's debts to the Divine Jurisprudence be paid in full, and that means that every man must:

a) Cease from sin immediately, perfectly and henceforth perpetually

b) Pay immediately the whole penalty for all sins to date, including his Adamic guilt. Since his sin is an affront to an infinite, eternal God, the payment for sin to satisfy Divine Justice will take eternity for a finite creature to pay off- thus eternal hell, the eternity thereof balancing the finitude of the sinner.

So when God commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30) it must be the same repentance that is demanded of both Elect and reprobate. And the scriptures no-where indicate any two-fold different levels of repentance in this respect. But the Scriptures do speak of a "legal repentance" such as that manifested by, for instance, Pharisees and others who think to justify themselves before God by works of the Law. Isaiah exposes such for what it is: **Isa 64:6** *But we are all as an unclean [thing], and all our righteousnesses [are] as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.* So how can God be only calling the reprobate to repentance on the level of "filthy rags"?

It is instructive at this juncture to look at what true repentance is, what the Divine demands are that are rightfully made of all men. True repentance proceeds from "godly sorrow" thus:

**2Co 7:10** *For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.*

True repentance arises from godly sorrow, i.e., it is the fruitage of grief concerning the individual's vile and criminal state before God, to whom he is infinitely in debt. That is, the individual realises the righteous demands God makes on him concerning justification.

The "sorrow of the world" is altogether different. The repentance it would work in an

individual altogether is unsatisfactory to God, and far from being the action of a sinner moving from a state of sin and misery into a state of salvation, it is in fact the activity of a sinner exchanging vulgar sins for what St. Augustine sagaciously denominated “splendid sins”.

Let us note now, the elements of true repentance, born of that godly sorrow of which the apostle speaks:

**2Co 7:11** *For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, [what] clearing of yourselves, yea, [what] indignation, yea, [what] fear, yea, [what] vehement desire, yea, [what] zeal, yea, [what] revenge! In all [things] ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.*

Note: the “what clearing of yourselves”. Those impelled by godly sorrow must, absolutely must, and cannot rest, until, they have “cleared themselves” with God, and have escaped His wrath and curse due to them for sin, and entered fellowship with Him.

Now, it happens, that Scripturally, there are two ways in which a man can clear himself with God, viz.:

1.) Give himself up for eternal damnation in Hell. (It will take him, as a finite creature, eternity to clear the record of his affrontery to the Infinite Majesty.)

2.) Give himself up to Jesus Christ, who will clear him with God by virtue of His own obedience, sacrifice and Priestly intercession.

To either 1) or 2) above, every man will be fitted in his place. But basic to the demand for “all men everywhere to repent” is God’s minimum demand, the minimum demand He can make without condoning or ignoring some sin, that the books of His Justice be balanced.

The argument that reprobate sinners cannot exercise godly sorrow in no way eviscerates their obligation to satisfy Divine justice.

Mr. Punford also drew attention to “Giving the seeming near obsession of the BRF with the Aristotelian laws of logic” !!!!! On this account I answer:

We in the BRF have never endorsed, or denied, any value or worth that may or may not be in the “Aristotelian laws of logic”. Truth is, Aristotle’s work on logic is a profound analytical description of the “building science” of human language and thought. As such his work is not necessarily wrong, wrong, wrong. On the contrary, we take great risks if we ignore such analysis, just as one would if in Engineering Science one ignored the analysis of Structures....our buildings would all be unsafe.

We note that in our “Journal” we have only consciously used two “Aristotelian” logic structures.....1) the “**law of the excluded middle**”, and 2) the “**sylogism**”. (The syllogism is explained on page 32 of this issue). Now it so happens we are in good company right here. The Bible itself *teems* with examples of the same viz. :

**Firstly:** the law of the excluded middle, which is summarised as:

“A thing cannot simultaneously be X and not X”.

A brief run through a reference Bible yields too many examples to list, but here is a small selection:

**Gen. 24:21** *And the man wondering at her held his peace, to wit whether the LORD had made his journey prosperous or not.* That is, either the Lord made his journey prosperous, or the Lord did not make his journey prosperous.

**Gen. 31:32** *know now whether it [be] thy son’s coat or no.* That is, either it is thy son’s coat, or it is not thy son’s coat.

**Exod. 16:4** *that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no.*

That is, either they will walk in my law, or they will not walk in my law.

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2 Cor.5:9 *Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.* That is, either we are present, or we are not present (i.e., absent)

The list can be multiplied: Exod. 17:7; Job 34:33; 2 Cor. 12:2; 3; Gal.3:2; 5; Eph. 6:8; Phil.1:18; 20; 27; .....and so on....

**Second, the syllogism:** Biblical examples abound, a few are:

**Gen.** 4:7; 18:26; 28:20-21; 32:8; 33:13; 34:17; 42:38; 44:26, 32; Exod. 1:16; 4:8; 4:23; 8:2.....hey! Wait a minute! All this was written by Moses, who lived 1000 years before Aristotle! So they're really "Moses's laws of logic", not Aristotle's ! Also syllogisms are found in the NT in for inst. Rom. 8:17; 25; 10:9;....etc., etc.,.....they abound.

While we deny being "obsessed" with Aristotle, we are nevertheless warranted, and rightly so, to take as much pains as possible to understand the "building science" of the human reasoning powers and speech which God originally gave Adam in Eden, when He created Adam in His own image and likeness. And we are bidden, by the Apostle in Scripture, to be "renewed in the spirit of (our) minds" (**Eph. 4:23**), and that we must "*put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him*" (**Col 3:10**). One might expect, therefore, Christian thinkers to be as deeply concerned to learn of the "building science" of human logic and speech, as they might be to learn medicine, and how to cure diseases. For such studies to proceed on a sanctified, prayerful, Biblical basis should be, I would think, part of a Christian thinker's calling. And in pursuing such studies in logic, let it be said that he will find that Aristotle, and a lot of others, have made as giant contributions to this subject as Newton or Einstein have made to physics. And it can be as dangerous to dismiss Aristotle in logic as to dismiss Newton in physics. That is not to say that Aristotle is right, right, right. But then, neither is he always wrong! Judicious analysis is called for in these matters.

Let the reader judge, is the BRJ being "polluted" by Greek philosophy in using this kind of language structure, or are we merely using the necessary connections which our Creator built in to the "architecture" and "science" of human thought and communications? Fact is, all Aristotle did was to observe, and to catalogue his observations concerning all this. And his catalogue in this is as profound as say, the Admiralty Tables (for navigation purposes at sea), and probably pretty near as reliable. But more of this below....

### Mr. Punford.

**Secondarily,** the pleasure God hath not in the death of the wicked: You seem to believe this concerns only the elect wicked who will later repent, and you may, of course, be correct, in the context concerned; but if one seriously believes God has pleasure in the death of the reprobate wicked then, by the same token, he must actually enjoy their punishment as it were sadistically; which no child of God would want to impute unto him. But if not,——— that is to say, if his pleasure is only that justice has been executed, then some degree of compassion must remain in Him —— for, if he has no sadistic pleasure therein, he must, perforce, have a regret therein, such as one of the "Heinz 57" varieties of common grace would attribute to him. And what is such regret, if it be not a species of compassion? Grace, as such, is indeed a misnomer; rather it is a common mercy which is the question that interests myself and many of the proponents of some of the varieties of common grace".

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### Editor's Response:

Since Mr. Punford wrote this paragraph, he has intimated to me via telephone conversation that he has moved somewhat closer to, if not co-incident with, the BRF position on common grace. We commend him for his diligent research, and determination to get to the bottom of things. For the reader's benefit we make here the following observations about the paragraph above:

**Calvin, Knox, Turretin** and Reformed expositors in general rightly interpret the verses concerning God having no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 18:32; 33:11) thus: *"(these verses) do not positively prove that which God has decreed in His secret counsel, but only declare what God is ready to do to all those who are brought to faith and repentance"* (**Calvin: Eternal Predestination of God**, p. 99) Mr. Punford accepted from the start that this exposition "may, of course, be correct, in the context concerned," as he says. But he seemed to want to universalize it to all men, on the grounds that:

1) If God did actually take pleasure in the destruction of the reprobate wicked, "then, by the same token, he must enjoy their punishment as it were sadistically...."

2) If God does not actually enjoy their punishment, or is but pleased only that justice has been done, then this implies some degree of regret over their death, and such is but one of the "57 varieties" of "common grace."

The above propositions are, however, seriously question-begging, as I suspect Mr. Punford now already has realized. First: How does "pleasure in destruction of the reprobate" necessarily imply sadism? Surely there must be pleasure in God when He sees His justice magnified before all creation in the destruction of the reprobate? Or if not, is God then not pleased with His own Justice? And if it is the Judicial factor that pleases God in the death of the reprobate, and not their suffering, how does this necessarily imply that God has regrets about their suffering? A man can "take no pleasure" in swotting flies without feeling any regrets about the flies, or having sadistic feelings, can he not?

Again, if God has regrets about the wicked suffering in time, then He must have such in Eternity as well, since, as the Scripture says:

Mal 3:6 *For I [am] the LORD, I **change not**; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.*

The Scripture, not Aristotle, note, teaches the immutability of God. Now if God has eternal regrets over anything He is eternally less than perfect. However, if He has regrets over the wicked suffering in time, and then no regrets after the wicked have been put in hell for eternity, then He must necessarily have changed, contra. the Scriptures.

Again, one senses a "whiff" of humanism in Mr. Punford's sentiments here. The Scripture gives a different perspective, sinful human beings as sinful human beings get a terrible pasting from Scripture, to degrees which make one catch one's breath; speaking of Babylon, the Psalmist sings:

Ps 137:9 Happy [shall he be], that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.

Sadistic? There are plenty more such Scriptures! But the fact is, if the Scriptures teach us anything at all about homo sapiens, they teach us this, that there is nothing, repeat, nothing in us by nature that will attract God's love. That's why salvation is all of grace.

And anyway, as Mr. Punford agrees in the last sentence of this paragraph, such regrets, if they did exist in God, hardly qualify as "grace", and indeed many who speak of what they call "common grace" mean such "common mercies" and nothing more. With such we have very little to quarrel about.

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**Mr. Punford:**

Thirdly, the B.R.F present themselves as being opposed to all apparent contradiction, seemingly preferring the law of non-contradiction to the mystery of God's incomprehensible nature and inscrutable wisdom, and yet, in the case of the purported serious call of the gospel, they deem this doctrine to be strangely consistent with that same limited atonement with which they find the infamous well meant offer inconsistent —is not this itself an inconsistency twice over? For if the free offer is deemed a contradiction to the limited atonement, why not also the serious call? Why seriously call someone whom one has no intention of saving? and why anyway accept that ability is not the measure of responsibility? Why do the B.R.F. not go the whole hog and remove these “contradictions” also?

**Editor's response:**

Can the “law of excluded middle” be legitimately applied to our comprehension of God? Is not God a mystery, and above such laws? Let us apply the law of excluded middle to Biblical Theological concepts, and see:

God is either immutable (Mal. 3:6), or He is not immutable

God is either omnipotent (Rev. 19:6), or He is not omnipotent

God is either self-existent (Exod. 3:14) or He is not self-existent

In other words, there are no in-betweens about it! That is what the “law of the excluded middle” describes. Purely a common feature of human language. And it is evident from the above examples, that it can be used legitimately in the language of Theology as applied to God. Now, one thing God cannot do, that is: tell lies. (So: Num. 23:19; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18). So when He tells us that He is immutable, then immutable He is. Consequently any exegesis from Scripture which delivers the opposite view, viz., that God has changed in some way, or changed His mind, must be faulty exegesis, either failing to come to terms with the language of anthropomorphisms or anthropopathisms in some way, or, just sheer incompetent or biased interpretation.

But Mr. Punford here puts forth the language of “mystery”. Surely, God is incomprehensible to finite beings? And therefore He is beyond the powers of our minds to comprehend and of our language to describe?

True, we finite beings will never fully know the Infinite God as He knows Himself. The Bible cannot be an exhaustive revelation of the Divine nature, but it is notable that Scripture only ever uses the word “mystery” concerning God when it talks of God “revealing” Himself, and dispelling “mystery”. A check out through a concordance will indicate this. Essentially, if God remains a mystery at all, it is to unbelievers, but to believers, He says: “*he that hath seen me hath seen the Father;*” (John 14:9); and Col 2:9 “*For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.*” Again, the Scripture describes the Lord as one: “*Who being the brightness of [his] glory, and the express image of his person,*” (Heb. 1:3). If the Lord Jesus is therefore the “express image” of the Father, then we see revealed in Him the very character of God, clearly revealed. And nothing revealed there is, or can be, contradictory to or in tension against the inward depths of the Divine being which we finite souls will never be able to penetrate. Otherwise Christ would not be His “express image”. We would, in such a case always have some doubts.....that deep down there in the unfathomable depths of the Eternal mind there's a lot of “mysterious” things that contradict the “express image” in Christ.

The Bible is God's self-revelation to His elect. Therein Christ speaks to His bride. So Scripture must axiomatically track along the laws of language and logic that the Almighty Himself designed and put into language in the first place, must it not? Otherwise, Scripture, is no Revelation at all, Christ's bride will be bamboozled by it. Revelation would then still be "a mystery", as **Barthian modernism** teaches.

We believe Scripture is wholly true, and wholly consistent internally, which it has to be in order to be wholly true. Inconsistency, failure to maintain "the law of the excluded middle", would involve Scripture in lies. Inconsistencies, contradictions, are not paradoxes, they are lies. (Paradoxes arise from misunderstanding of phenomena, not the phenomena themselves). And thus it is we can trust God, that really in the very depths of His unfathomable Being, He is the same as He is in Jesus Christ, revealed to us, the "express image of His person". And thus we repose our total trust in Him.

Is the "Call of the Gospel" a contradiction of Limited Atonement just as much as is "the well-meant offer"? No. The "well-meant offer" theology includes a declaration to the reprobate that God wants to save them. "Gospel Call" theology is distinguished in that it carries no such declaration. "Well-meant offer" theology is in contradiction to the whole phalanx of Scripture, and its proponents justify it on the basis of paradox. But a manifest contradiction is no paradox. It is a lie. The "Gospel Call" theology in contrast lays down God's preceptive will, what sinners ought to do, not what He has predestined them to do. In like manner God commanded Pharaoh to release His people, but had already predestined Pharaoh to ruin, because: **Rom. 9:17** *For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.* Hence God's over-arching purpose was that Pharaoh should disobey His command, and thereby merit a public demonstration of Divine Justice.

Ability cannot, in the sinner's case before God, be the measure of his responsibility, as by his wilful sin in Adam he voluntarily and knowingly took inability on board. Thus if a man borrows a million from the Bank, then "blows" it, he is still liable to repay it with interest, even though now **totally incapable** of so doing. To abrogate such a principle is to excuse, and even endorse, sinning to the ultimate extreme. Thus under the Adamic covenant, every sinner retains **total** liability, alongside **total** inability. A dreadful state!

## Correspondence..... Contin. from Page 48.

**From: Dr. Stephen Westcott  
Reformation Christian Ministries  
Bristol.**

Dear editor and friends,

Michael Dove in Bournemouth raises the question (in British Reformed Journal Issue No. 17, Jan-March 1997 page 48) of J.I. Packer's 'recommendation' printed with John Owen's **Biblical Theology**, and he is right to do so.

I presume that Soli Deo Gloria (the pub-

lishers) obtained this because J. Packer is thought of as an Owen 'expert', but certainly this translator/editor was not consulted about this in any way in advance, nor was his agreement sought.

If I recollect my comment at the time, it was that as Mr. Packer seems willing to add similar prefaces to books from all over the theological spectrum, I personally regarded that coin as being very much a devalued one indeed! I trust that the book is its *own recommendation*.