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Calvinism & the Plymouth Brethren Movement

Compiled by David Dunlap

Many well-known Bible teachers and leaders connected to the Plymouth Brethren movement did not hold to a rigid form Calvinism. This article lists quotations from many who did not teach or hold to extreme Calvinism. Plymouth Brethren leaders greatly influenced the evangelical movement from the 1800s through the 1950s. Their world-wide influence is still felt to the present day. This quotation list is in no particular order.

William MacDonald—(1917-2007) Bible School President

“Many are called is that the gospel invitation goes out to many. But few are chosen. The expression ‘few are chosen’ does not mean that God is arbitrary in selecting only a few for salvation. All who respond to the good news are chosen. The only way a person can tell if he is chosen is by what he does with the Lord Jesus Christ.” —William MacDonald, *Matthew: Behold Your King*, (Kansas City, KS: Walterick, 1974), p. 249

John Phillips (1927-2010) Bible Commentator & Expositor

“God does not act in an arbitrary way nor in defiance of the human will when he draws people to Christ. Someone once tried to persuade me that God has chosen some people for salvation and chosen other people for damnation. Such an idea is monstrous. God does not arbitrarily and sovereignly damn the greater part of the human race into an existence they did not seek, on terms they did not select, ... just in order arbitrarily to send people to hell for not choosing a salvation offered only to the elect. That may be some people’s idea of God and some people’s idea of salvation, but such concepts make God out to be a tyrant worse than any in the history of the human race.” —John Phillips, *Gospel of John*, (Grand Rapids, Kregel, 1989) p. 129

Sir Robert Anderson - (1841-1918) Author and Theologian

“First, the scriptural expression ‘God’s Elect’ is a title of dignity and privilege, applicable exclusively to the Christian. Secondly, the prominent thought in election is rank and privilege and not salvation from judgment and sin.” —Sir Robert Anderson, *The Gospel and Its Ministry*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1978), p. 76

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William MacDonald
(1917-2007)

“New birth is by the Word of God. That it is a sovereign act of God, by His Spirit, none can question.

But this verse forbids us from separating, as has sometimes been done, new birth from faith in the gospel. It has been taught that new birth precedes faith; here we are told that the Word of God is the instrument in new birth. “Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.”

**Samuel Ridout
(1855-1930)**

Dr. John Lennox—(1943-present) Christian apologist

(commenting on John 6:37,39-40) “The double reference to the Father’s will (v. 37) suggests that the second statement explains the first. The emphasis in the first is on the Father’s giving, and in the second on human responsibility to believe (him who comes). That is, those whom the Father has given him are precisely those who have looked to the Son and believed in Him. The giving is not an arbitrary act of divine determination. God is determining that those who come, look, and believe will never be lost.”
—*Determined to Believe?*(Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), p. 174

Dr. Harry Ironside—(1876-1951) Author and Bible Teacher

“There are two things that are absolutely clear in Scripture—one is that God by His foreknowledge has predestinated all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ “to be conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom. 8:29). Predestination is never to heaven nor yet to hell; but always to special privilege in and with Christ. All who believe in Him were chosen in Christ “before the foundation of the world.”

—*What’s the Answer*, (Grand Rapids, MI : Zondervan, MI, 1944), p. 43

Harold St. John—(1876-1957) Author and Bible Teacher

“Throughout Church history the doctrines of election as expounded by Muslim mullahs, Medieval masters, and the Reformers of the Renaissance are as difficult to understand as they are impossible to accept. The electing love of God is always exercised in view of the particular task for which the candidate is fitted. Paul was a vessel of election chosen to carry Christ before kings, and he knew that that the saints at Thessalonica were God’s elect because of faith, love and hope.”

— *Ephesians*, (Waynesboro, GA: Christian Missions Press, 1962), p. 19

C. F. Hogg—(1859-1943) Author - Associate of W. E. Vine

It is well to notice, too, that Scripture never speaks of election or predestination to a place, heaven or hell. Scripture does not speak of the believer as having been “crucified, buried, and raised with Christ back in the eternal ages.” Election in the Scriptures is to holiness, and to Christ-likeness.—*What Saith the Scriptures*, (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1947), p. 44

Samuel Ridout—(1855-1930) Author and Bible Teacher

“Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible seed, by the Word of God, which lives and abides forever” (1 Peter 1:23). New birth is by the Word of God. That it is a sovereign act of God, by His Spirit, none can question. But this verse forbids us from separating, as has sometimes been done, new birth from faith in the gospel. It has been taught that new birth precedes faith; here we are told that the Word of God is the instrument in new birth. “Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God”; “the Word which by the gospel is preached.” Thus while we can distinguish between faith and new birth, we cannot separate them. John 3:3 and 3:16 must ever go together. There is no such anomaly possible as a man born again, but who has not yet believed the gospel.

—*Numerical Bible*, Vol. 6, (NY: Loizeaux, 1903), pp. 148-149

W. E. Vine—(1873-1949) Author & Greek Authority

(Commenting on John 6:37) “This sublime utterance conveys two fundamental facts regarding God and man, (1) the eternal foreknowledge and electing purpose of God in salvation, (2) the exercise of human free will to accept God conditions or to reject them. Human experience confirms both verities. ... ‘him that’ in masculine (Greek gender), speaking of each individual who, exercising his will to accept the offer, decides to come to Christ.” —*John: His Record of Christ*, (London: Oliphants, 1948), p. 60

“Believers are elect, as being chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, all of them being foreknown and foreseen as such by God, those whom He foreknew He chose, and that always for specific purposes. The source of their election is God’s matchless grace...” — *Epistles of Timothy and Titus*, (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI, 1965), p. 152

G. H. Lang—(1876-1955) Theologian & Bible Teacher

“What I would add is the view that the passages as to election and predestination do not apply to the question of salvation, but rather to the prospects of persons already saved... Foreordination is unto conformity to the image of God’s Son, to being glorified.” — *World Chaos: Its Roots and Remedy*, (London: Paternoster Press, 1950), pp. 64-66

Dave Hunt—(1926-2013) Author, Lecturer, Apologist

“What love is this? Some Calvinists willingly admit that the real issue is whether it can properly be said that God desires the salvation of all men. Calvinists insist that God has no such desire. In zealously defending God’s sovereignty, Calvinism brings reproach upon His character.”— *What Love Is This?*, (Sisters, OR: Loyal Publishers, 2002), p. 352

C. H. Mackintosh—(1820-1896) Respected author of *Notes on the Pentateuch*

“Difficulty is occasioned by the influence of a one-sided theology (Calvinism), a system that we can only compare to a bird with one wing or a boat with one oar...We find (in the Bible), laying side by side, the truth of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Are we call to reconcile them? No, they are reconciled already because they are both set forth in the Word of God...It is a fatal mistake for men to frame systems of divinity.” —*Short Papers vol. 2*, (Sunbury, PA: Believers Bookshelf, 1975), 267

“Nothing is more damaging to the truth of God, more withering to the soul or more subversive of all spiritual growth and progress...If I am taught to regard the ‘five points’ as the ‘faith of God’s elect.’ I shall not think of looking beyond them; and then a most glorious field of heavenly truth is shut out from the vision of my soul. I am stunted, narrow, one-sided; and I am in danger of getting into that hard, dry state of soul which results from being occupied with mere points of doctrine instead of Christ. — *Mackintosh Treasury, One-Sided Theology*, (Sunbury, PA: Believers Bookshelf, 1975), p. 605

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Robert J. Little—(1897-1972) Author & Bible teacher on Moody Radio

"My own view coincides with that of those who believe that as God gave man, in the garden of Eden the choice to obey or disobey His commandments, so now He gives men the choice of submitting to Christ, receiving Him by faith as their Lord and Savior, or refusing to do so. We are told in 1 Peter 1:2 that God made His choice (or "election") on the basis of His foreknowledge, so that He did not have to wait until man's choice was made to be able to make His decision.

—Robert J. Little, *Here's Your Answer*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1967), p. 180

F. W. Grant—(1834-1902) Assembly leader, author, & Bible teacher from Plainfield, NJ

"God's love to the world is manifested on the cross. It is not allowable to narrow this down to a love simply for the elect, as has been only too often done...there cannot be a contrary decree that will hinder the salvation of any."

—F. W. Grant "Sovereignty of God in Salvation" Treasury of Truth #126, Loizeaux Brothers, NY, ND)

R. E. Harlow—(1908-2003) Founder of Everyday Publications and Emmaus Bible School

"The Son looks on believers as gifts from His Father (John 6:37). Some people worry whether they belong to the "elect"; perhaps they were not among those given to given to the Son. It is true that God knows in advance those who will trust on the Savior, but He does not force anyone to come. God chose us in Christ, Ephesians. 1:4."

—R. E. Harlow, *Commentary on John*, (Scarborough, Ont., CA: Everyday Publications, 1993), p. 91