

A Review of *Debating Calvinism* (Multnomah Publishers, 2004), by Dave Hunt & James White
by Pastor Steven J. Cole

Someone gave me a coffee mug for Christmas that has a picture of John Calvin and a quote from the great Reformer: "A dog barks when his master is attacked. I would be a coward if I saw that God's truth is attacked and yet would remain silent."

Please allow me to bark! James White does an admirable job of defending the truth in his part of *Debating Calvinism*, but Dave Hunt throws out so many errors in his sections that White can only pick the most flagrant ones to respond to. The sad thing is that those who are not well-read on Calvin will not spot Hunt's many blatant doctrinal errors and his vicious misrepresentations of Calvin's character and writings. Thus they may be tainted and miss the treasures that await the believer in the writings of Calvin and other Reformed writers (like the Puritans). I have read thousands of pages of Calvin's writings, plus numerous biographies and works about Calvinism. On that basis and because of my personal correspondence with Hunt, I can categorically state that he is deliberately slandering the man and his teaching. I have told Hunt this directly and asked him to examine the facts, but he refuses to do so.

Throughout the book, White offers sound biblical exegesis of key passages, while Hunt responds with dozens of irrelevant verses, revealing that he does not understand the position he is attacking. He frequently stands verses on their heads, making them say the opposite of what they really say (John 6:44, for example). When he can't do that, because it is so obvious what the verse says (as with Acts 13:48), Hunt says that it can't mean the obvious because it would go against all the verses on the Bible about free will! But he never explains why Luke wrote it that way. He repeatedly accuses Calvinists of things that Calvinists themselves do not believe. For example, in spite of White's clear correction, Hunt says that Calvinists deny that people have a will! Many more examples could easily be cited to show that Hunt simply misunderstands what Calvinism teaches.

But there are substantive differences between Hunt's view of God and the biblical (Calvinistic) view. Hunt effectively robs God of His sovereignty (although he would deny this). He turns *divine* election into *human* election by insisting that it means that God *foresaw* who would believe and chose them. This means, of course, that God devised His eternal plan of salvation based upon *what man would do*, not upon His purpose and choice, as Scripture so plainly affirms (Rom. 9:11-18). Hunt dismisses White's careful explanation of the Greek word for "foreknowledge," and then accuses Calvinists of denying God's omniscience! Amazing! Hunt's view also undermines God's grace, because it makes grace depend on something God foresaw that *we* would do, not on His unconditional favor (Rom. 11:6). Hunt asserts that all men can believe apart from God granting faith as a gift.

Hunt has the audacity to state, "It is not loving—period—for God to damn for eternity *anyone* He *could* save" (p. 260, italics his). In other words, if God has the *ability* to save a sinner, but He doesn't do it, He is unloving. The only conclusion, then, is that God is *impotent* to save anyone without that person's cooperation, which is what Hunt actually teaches! Strangely, Hunt is blind to the fact that his charge against God is precisely the one that Paul anticipates and answers when he presents the doctrine of God's sovereign election, namely, "If God loved Jacob and hated Esau apart from anything that they did, then God is not fair" (Rom. 9:14). Hunt's attempted dodge, that Romans 9 is about *nations*, not individuals, doesn't solve his problem. Even if we grant the point (which is untrue), okay, so God granted the way of salvation to the Jews and shut out the Edomites. How does this make things fair for the Edomites (not to mention the Chinese, Africans, Indians, Australians, etc., etc.)?

Hunt repeatedly accuses Calvinists of making God the author of evil because we affirm that He ordains everything according to His sovereign purpose (Eph. 1:11). Hunt never explains an alternative, except that God *permits* (not ordains) evil. Calvin cited Augustine, who effectively answered this: "[Y]et he does not unwillingly permit it, but willingly; nor would he, being good, allow evil to be done, unless being also almighty he could make good even out of evil" (*Institutes*, I:XVIII:3). If God permitted evil *unwillingly*, you have moved into dualism (with an evil power at least equal to God), which is Zoroastrian, not Christian. But Hunt doesn't bother explaining his view.

Hunt's main problem is that he refuses to submit to God's revelation of truth. He wants it all to be logical. But there are other difficult doctrines in the Bible that do not fit human logic, for example, the Trinity, and the two natures of Christ in one person. We can't figure them out; we must submit to what God has declared, maintaining the fine balance of Scripture. The same is true of His sovereignty and man's responsibility. They are both true. But God's sovereignty prevails (Phil. 2:12-13). The crucial question is, who gets the glory in our salvation? Does God alone get the glory because salvation is *all* from Him, or does He share it with us because we decided on our own, apart from God, to believe in Christ? White's view glorifies God. Hunt's view shares God's glory with the sinful, rebellious creature. It doesn't take a Ph.D. in theology to figure out which view is right!