



# Chosen But Free

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## **Chosen But Free** Norman L. Geisler

Is God in Control, or Do We have a Choice? The seemingly endless debate between Calvinism and Arminianism continues to make its rounds throughout the Christian community. Polarized beliefs have dominated and divided the theological landscape of the twentieth century, while many observers wonder, "Does it really make a difference?" Chosen But Free answers with a resounding yes. But rather than pitting one strong perspective against another, this brilliant work presents a cogent and sensible moderate view, providing readers with one of the first books that convincingly affirms both the sovereignty and foreknowledge of God and the human responsibility to either receive or reject Him.

Includes a response to *The Potter's Freedom* by James R. White. The Definitive Work on the Relationship Between Divine Election and Human Choice.

## **Chosen But Free Details**

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Author : Norman L. Geisler

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# From Reader Review Chosen But Free for online ebook

## Brian Pate says

Read for the internship at Stanley Heights Baptist Church.

There was some good in this book, like the first chapter, which I agreed with entirely. “God’s sovereignty over the human will includes His initiating, pursuing, persuading, and saving grace without which no one would ever will to be saved” (18).

He states, “Ought implies can” (30). Since we are commanded to believe, he assumes that we are able to respond (35). However, throughout the Bible, people have been commanded to do things they cannot do, like circumcise their hearts or for dry bones to live.

Geisler relied heavily on “good reason” (e.g., 33), philosophy, and logic. It is hard to blame him because he is, first and foremost, an apologist. I would have liked it if he dealt with more Scripture. “The logic is flawless” (43). He often says, “as is clear from the Bible and good reason” (e.g., 33, 44, 48). I feel like he is trying to squeeze God into the box of “logic.”

He attempts to force Calvinists into a logical trilemma of choosing between God’s (1) omnipotence, (2) omnibenevolence, and (3) sovereign election (e.g., 179). This is not the Calvinist’s problem. This is God’s problem! It is his mystery, and he has chosen not to reveal it to us.

His labels are very confusing: “Extreme Calvinism” and “Moderate Calvinism.” Within MC, he includes Ryrie, Walvoord, and Chafer, even stating that they were 4-point Calvinists. Throughout chapter 2, he favorably quotes W. G. T. Shedd, a “moderate Calvinist.” Geisler calls himself a moderate Calvinist (99) when he is nothing close to a Calvinist (he attempts to undermine and then redefine 4 of the points!). At times, I agreed with both EC and MC. At times, MC was not Calvinism at all! In his explanation of EC, he lumped together some truly extreme opinions (hyper-Calvinism) with normal Calvinism. This is very misleading. It is also misleading to call your position “moderate Calvinism” when it is not anything close to traditional Calvinism. He does not call Calvin an EC because he was only 4-point, even though he was “extreme” on those four points (160). Misleading.

He is concerned with two extremes: traditional Calvinism and Open Theism. If you fall between these “extremes,” then apparently you are okay.

The position espoused by Geisler is actually “moderate Arminianism.” It is traditional Arminianism, modified on two points: he believes in the substitutionary atonement and eternal security. Therefore, it is dishonest to call himself a “moderate Calvinist.” (If he is so opposed to Calvinism, why would he want to be anything akin to it?)

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## Zoe Scrivener says

It's hard to rate a book based on its quality, rather than its view. So my rating has nothing to do with whether or not I agree with the view Geisler espouses.

First of all, of all the books I'd read on the subject so far, this one used Scripture more than any other, so I commend Geisler for that.

His argumentation, however, was often faulty, and quotations, whether from Scripture or other authors were often used out of context. Exegesis was shaky.

In his reply to *The Potter's Freedom*, Geisler claims that White sounds arrogant. While this was true of White *at times*, I would like to note that Geisler himself took on an arrogant tone throughout his reply. In addition, after cross-referencing some of his replies to *PF*, it was obvious that Geisler continued using things out of context and did not understand what White was saying.

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### **Bryant Rudisill says**

Has the great apologist of the Christian faith; a modern-day Thomas Aquinas; today's philosophical genius prepared a truly "definitive" work in finding a middle ground between historic Calvinism and historic Arminianism? With the scholastic notoriety of this philosopher-theologian one would think so. However, what we have here presented by Dr. Norman Geisler is nothing more than post-modern philosophical humanism read into the texts of our beloved Scripture. Dr. Geisler's "exegesis" of Holy Text presupposes his philosophical bias, and in doing so completely contorts and distorts Scripture from its true context and meaning. In an attempt to not to appear like a new wave of Arminianism attempting to rise up from the seed of its late father, Pelagius, Dr. Geisler has made every attempt to redefine the points of historic Calvinism to suit his whim. Friends, this is not the work of our beloved scholar, Dr. Norman Geisler. As I approached the end of this treatment on God's sovereignty and man's will, all I could hope was that it was either a big joke he would clarify or that a fraud had stolen our fellow brother in faith's pen.

No sound exegesis of God's Word is offered. It is treated in a flippant and simple manner. Historic Calvinism and even John Calvin himself is taken out of it's original context and misrepresented. Dr. Geisler brandishes his sword against the straw men caricatures he's created of the "5 points," YET even then he is unable to overthrow the Reformed faith we so hold to as pure gospel. In allowing his own reasoning to interpret Scripture, rather than looking to Reason Himself found IN the Scripture, we have yet again another attempt to raise the dead corpses of the followers of Pelagius and Arminius.

In response to Dr. Geisler's response of James White's rebuttal in *The Potter's Freedom*, Dr. Geisler offers no exegesis against the questioned text; no defense against the argument's that White has used to reveal the "king without his clothes," so to speak. Instead, Dr. Geisler affirms he agrees (!) with most of what White says, then proceeds to show the logical fallacies presented in *The Potter's Freedom*. Dr. Geisler is a philosophical genius and nothing can be said of his ability to take an opponent of his and find flaws in their argument; however, in doing so, Dr. Geisler falls into his own "red herring" fallacy by diverting the issue.

Soli Deo gloria!

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### **Todd Miles says**

This is a very frustrating book. Geisler calls himself a "moderate Calvinist," centering himself between extreme Calvinism and extreme Arminianism. He resents being called an Arminian because he affirms the

eternal security of the believer, and opts for forms of irresistible grace and unconditional election that look for all the world like resistible grace and conditional election. Fundamental to his position is his absolute commitment to libertarian free will which he refers to as "true freedom" throughout. Yet despite this he fancies himself a moderate or centrist. He is able to do this with a straight face by establishing "extreme Arminianism" as Open Theism, while "extreme Calvinism" is stock Calvinism, held by virtually every Calvinist I have ever met (including myself). How is this legitimate? Rather than rehearse all my frustrations with the book, I will simply state that he would have benefited by having a Calvinist read the manuscript and point out all the areas where Calvinists would consider his caricatures unfair. This book will encourage all those committed to libertarian freedom in their position, while not changing the minds of any Calvinists.

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## **J. Rutherford says**

I am currently in the process of writing a full review, but for now it will suffice to say; Geisler misrepresents the opposing views, neglects sound exegesis, and commits numerous informal fallacies (and a few formal ones) to present a largely incoherent and undefended view of "Moderate Calvinism"--really, an incoherent semi-Pelagian (accepting "total depravity," but saying that God only gives grace to the willing; which is the semi-pelagian position, human movement towards God comes before God's grace given to man) and Arminian position (because for all his talk he ends up affirming complete unlimited atonement and conditional election). He also affirms a Dispensational position of Once Saved Always Saved which has oft been accused of antinomianism.

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## **Frank Peters says**

This book sat for a long time on my shelf, partially due to the large range of reviews and ratings. It is evident that many love the book, and equally as many hate it. In spite of the emotions this book evidently generates, I am fully in agreement with what Geisler is trying to do. Like Geisler, I remain concerned about both extremes, but unlike Geisler, I am much more concerned about the extremes of Calvinism, which in my limited experience result in excess pride (which is rather ironic, given the Calvinist perspective) and too often a lack of fruit. On the other hand, my many Open Theist friends are people I am happy to count as brothers in Christ. For anyone reading this, I attempt to stay in the somewhat agnostic in the middle, where my Open Theist friends consider me a Calvinist, my Calvinist friends consider me an Arminian, and my mildly Calvinist, reformed friends consider me one of them. In other words, I am fairly close to Geisler and as a result could be expected to give this book a high rating. But I will not.

Even while I agree with most of his arguments, I don't like the book. It is too dry, and reads like an encyclopaedia. As many other reviewers have pointed out, he only presents his own case well, but poorly represents everyone else. Thus, most negative comments are from Calvinists (who Geisler and I would call extreme), who are offended by his labelling their views as extreme and bothered by his misrepresenting them. Similarly, any Open Theist or Arminian would be irritated by his treatment of their views. I do however think this book could be useful by providing a platform for the debate between Calvinism and Arminianism; if there was a debate. But unfortunately, I rarely see or read any discussion and debate as each side "knows" it is correct and enjoys making a straw man of the other. Instead, I will keep trying to follow John 13:34 regardless of anyone's viewpoint on this issue. I believe my salvation is based on what Jesus has done, not on my theological interpretation of an issue that has caused dissension and division for too many hundreds of years.

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### **Matt says**

This book is deceptive in the use of its labels "moderate calvinism" and "moderate arminianism". What is presented is none of those. There is no calvinism whatsoever without a God given faith through the spirit (total depravity). Remove that (like Geisler did) and you end up with something (Thomism), but certainly not a form of calvinism. There are better books presenting an alternative to calvinism.

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### **Felipe says**

Geisler usa definições enganosas (chamando verdadeiros calvinistas de hiper-calvinistas), representa maliciosamente seus oponentes teológicos, comete várias falácias e apresenta exegeses pífias de diversos textos.

Cadê a opção de zero estrelas? Este livro é um lixo. Gastar papel para publicar uma porcaria dessa é quase um sacrilégio.

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### **Joey says**

This was a good read, however Geisler is a bit biased or so it would seem. He takes a lot of his time on refuting the Calvinists and seems to have a slightly skewed view of extreme v moderate Calvinism. He refutes limited atonement and unconditional election on the reformed side while refuting open theism and loss of salvation on the arminian side. Decent exegesis, sometimes really strong, sometimes not so strong or rather more poorly explained. Strong logic which he places after exegesis and hermeneutics so as to keep doctrine and theology first followed by logic and philosophy in order to strengthen his case which I can respect. I would recommend this book to anyone well versed in the "dilemma" but would hesitate before giving it to someone wanting to learn more as it is a bit much and is quite heady.

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### **Justin Wilson says**

This was a painful read. Geisler's humanistic reasoning and horrible exegesis are truly a headache.

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### **Tuese Ahkiong says**

Geisler is so confusing. He's trying to redefine Calvinistic/Reformed theology and come out as Reformed when he is not.

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## Jason says

After reading this book the impression I have of the author is that he wants to be in the club, but does not want to pay the dues. What I mean by this is Norman Geisler wants to be a Calvinist, but rejects TULIP. So, to get around this obvious contradiction, he invents new categories of Calvinism. Those he opposes are called "extreme" Calvinists. Those that agree with him are moderate Calvinist. Through this book, Geisler over emphasizes the love of God at the expense of God's other attributes such as justice and wrath. As a 5 point Calvinist, I was really looking forward to reading this book and with an open mind seeing the other side. This book did nothing to convince me the 5 points are error, but instead strengthened my conviction that they are Biblical.

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## Daniel says

Geisler has written so many useful works, but this does not even begin to make it on that list. After redefining historical positions and terms and "finally solving" the paradox of God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility (a claim he made on the radio) we get to hear 3 verses repeated over and over again against any argument he may come up against (never-mind that these verses are taken out of context and even misquoted). There is a reason so many have claimed that this book converted them to Calvinism.

This book reflects both Arminianism and Calvinism poorly. Also, the Calvinistic (as understood by their own confessions - such as Westminster) view of divine sovereignty and human freedom falls under the rubric of compatibilism. So, a title like "Chosen AND Free" could be affirmed by so called "extreme-Calvinist". Calvinists deny the ability for an individual to do that which is contrary to their nature, not the freedom for self-produced motives that are consistent with their desires.

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## David Kemp says

I have been looking for this book since November 5, 1990. That was the day I completed reading the book: Chosen by God (By R.C. Sproul).

Sproul introduced me in a whole new way to the depth and richness of the doctrine of the sovereignty of God—like water to a drowning man. From that day forward there has been a deep settled peace in my heart concerning life in general, my life in particular and my salvation specifically. I will forever be grateful (and indebted) to R.C. Sproul for this.

That's the good news. The bad news is that Sproul also introduced me to what Geisler would term "extreme Calvinism".

Most of what Sproul wrote I was comfortable with, but there was one alarming concept introduced to me which has troubled me ever since I first read Chosen by God back in 1990.

What troubled me was the concept of "Limited Atonement".

Limited Atonement is the belief that Jesus didn't really die for everyone—just those few special people who God decided for reasons we do not know to “elect”.

The rest of the poor blokes out there could not be saved even if they wanted to. Actually, according to extreme Calvinism even those that are saved did not “want” to be saved (how can a dead man want anything?). Instead, God simply forces a few whom He elects to be saved and they're dragged into Heaven kicking and screaming whether they want to go or not.

Of course that is not how it is presented but for all practical purposes that is how it goes.

That concept started me on a journey that has been troubling. Here I was, preaching a gospel that declared that God loved the whole world and that God had graciously endowed everyone with the ability to hear the Gospel and believe so that “whosoever” could be saved (John 3:16). Yet people who I admired and respected told me that this was not really the case (R.C. Sproul, John Piper, and Robert L. Reymond for example).

How could that be? Enter Norman Geisler and his book “Chosen But Free.” Broadly, Geisler addresses extreme elements of both Arminianism and Calvinism weaving in sound reasoning and clear exposition from Holy Scripture. I consider Chosen But Free one of the most important books I've ever read and recommend it highly—for me it has been a game-breaker.

Thank God for Norman Geisler and R. C. Sproul; in the end they have both helped me tremendously.

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## **Josh says**

Due to the fact that people I know and respect have spoken highly of Norman Geisler's book, Chosen But Free, and people I know and respect have also spoken quite critically of this book, I decided to grab the Kindle version and give it a read. There is praise to be offered and well-deserved criticism to be voiced as well.

Chapter 1 is a great introduction to the topic of God's sovereignty. Geisler spends an extended amount of time affirming God as sovereign over all, even the choices of men. On the surface and divorced from the rest of the text, chapter 1 is a tremendous defense of God being God over all, even the hearts of men. Geisler spends the rest of the book, however, undermining the firm foundation that Scripture laid for him in the first few pages.

Geisler's entire thesis centers around his argument that love can only be love if it is totally free (that is, free of any influence whether external or internal). Coupled with that is the strong insinuation that the moral free choice is either the totality or the majority of what it means to be created in God's image. Geisler never offers any consistent Scriptural basis for his position. As far as I can see, He roots this assumption in his own opinion and the fact that his entire soteriological framework would come crashing down upon itself if this were not the case.

One of the great flaws of this text is the reduction of Calvinism (Reformed Theology) to TULIP. Reformed Theology is not TULIP. Reformed Theology, Calvinism, is a garden filled with beautiful theological flowers, including a TULIP. Due to the subject Geisler undertakes and the fact that so many have perpetuated this



reductionist attitude from within the ranks of professing Calvinists, I can understand why Geisler sees it this way and portrays it as such. Yet, since so much of Reformed Soteriology(TULIP) is based in the greater framework of Reformed/Covenant Theology, it would be quite beneficial to understand Reformed Soteriology within this broader context.

Beyond that, Geisler consistently misrepresents the points of TULIP, proceeding then to claim that any who would offer correction are “embarrassed” by their belief in that specific point. Going further, Geisler even accuses the dissenter of dishonesty, saying that he tries to hide what his doctrine actually teaches. This begins a hundreds of pages of rhetoric based on Geisler's army of straw men. Geisler does a brilliant job, throughout the text, of dismantling the “Extreme Calvinism” that he presents. The main problem, however, remains that the view he presents is not, for the most part, the consensus view of those that he labels with the position.

One of the flaws of Geisler's system is seen when Geisler posits his understanding of the P of TULIP, perseverance of the saints. Geisler addresses the fact that once someone is a born again believer then they cannot choose to reject God, ultimately falling away from his/her salvation. Yet, somehow Geisler says they are still free in relation to his/her salvation. His reasoning is simple although not stated. If he were to admit that this lack of viable choice has limited their free will, thus making their love of God after conversion null due to the lack of libertarian freedom, then his entire premise falls. Rather than address this, Geisler chooses to make a couple of points.

First, Geisler points out that this reasoning(that is, the idea that to be free you have to have the option to make a choice without any external or internal constraints or influence) “is speculative and should be treated as such”, because it is “not biblically based”. This seems like an odd point to make, a point with which I agree, because it is the basis for his entire premise. I am glad he admits it is not biblically based, I just wish he would have felt free not to propagate such an unbiblical and speculative position in the first place.

He follows with the argument that some decisions are once for all, but his argument is really a red herring because the point is about continuing freedom. If Adam's decision to rebel did not “erase the image of God”(that is, remove libertarian freedom) in himself or his progeny, then why would a decision to follow Christ in faith “erase the image of God”(that is, remove libertarian freedom).

Finally, he addresses the “extreme Arminian”(usually when Geisler attaches the word “extreme” to something we can feel free to replace it with “historical” or “classical” or “orthodox”, because this is how he uses the word. However, he chooses to limit the term “extreme” in regards to arminianism to reference open theists, “neotheists”) He urges them to consider the logical outcome of this line of thought. If we have to have the option to reject God after salvation to be free, then we could not be “free” in heaven because no orthodox believer holds to the view that you can reject salvation in the eternal state. But since Geisler equates “image of God” with libertarian freedom, then we have to be free in this sense, even in heaven...and even when we are completely incapable of exercising this freedom.

This would be a good point for Geisler to acknowledge and submit to the view of creaturely freedom espoused by Johnathan Edwards(a view repeatedly mocked and misrepresented by Geisler in the book) because it would be helpful to see why we are free. Edwards argues that freedom is the ability to do what we want, to follow our desires. It is not a libertarian/tabula rasa freedom that pretends like there are no influences that affect, motivate or even compel our decisions. Rather, we freely do what we want to do. Sinners freely sin because, by nature, they are sinners. God even limits His own freedom in this sense, consistently in Scripture indicating that He will never do anything contrary to His nature. Indeed, that He cannot(that is, He is not free to) do anything that is contrary to His nature, His ultimate desires. This is why,

for us to believe in God, we must be gifted a new nature. Regeneration must precede faith, because left in our sin nature we will never choose God.

Geisler also attacks the reformed presentation of God as unloving for a number of reasons. Geisler argues that for God to be all-loving, He must make a way and offer of salvation unto all, without violating their libertarian free will. Geisler says “any diminution of God's love(see offer of salvation without violation of free will) will sooner or later eat away at one's confidence in God's benevolence.” Since “extreme Calvinists” argue from Scripture that God made atonement for the elect, loving the elect with a special love then God is not all-loving. Beyond that, He is not truly loving even to the elect because in raising them with an irresistible (effectual) grace from spiritual sickness(death), he violated their free (temporal and sin-bound) will.

I would pose a couple of questions. Who would argue that it would be unloving for a father to pull a toddler out of the way of a speeding car simply because it was done against their immediate (see momentary, ignorant, deadly desires) will and that any affection shown after would be coerced and not true appreciation and love? This Father's love was irresistible, because if He allowed ultimate resistance, the child he loved would have perished. Our court system recognizes that for a parent to not offer irresistible love in this manner is criminal, why should the God of the universe be held to a lower standard than any citizen of this country?

My second question would be, if God does not offer the post-fall Satan a chance at redemption, then is He unloving? At the very least we should be able to agree that God does not love Satan, but Geisler argues that any diminution of God's love, which has to be expressed as an offer of salvation without the violation of free will, undermines our “trust in the love of God”. To prove this point Geisler even seems to indicate in his footnote reference of Charles Darwin and Bertrand Russel that for us to believe in a God who damns sinners eternally is undermining the love of God. (See footnote 168 and please correct me if I have misread this.)

From the outset of *Chosen but Free*, Norman Geisler sets off on a polemical cruise of invective, caricature, and straw men, attacking and misrepresenting not only “Extreme Calvinism”(anyone who affirms 5 points of Reformed Soteriology) but traditional Arminianism and Open Theism. Geisler makes such a habit in the book of misrepresenting the opposing view and then dismantling this creation he has ascribed to his opponents that it is difficult to believe it is all without intent. The tone throughout the book was not one of genuine discourse in a spirit of communal edification, but rather that of someone who cherishes a view of freedom beyond the Scriptures, the community of faith and even God Himself. This book could have been good, but it crumbled under the weight of its flawed premise and the presuppositions of its author. For a good understanding of the Calvinism debate, see *For Calvinism*(Horton) and *Against Calvinism*(Olson). For a one-stop source of differing understandings of the doctrine of election, see *Perspective on Election* edited by Chad Brand. For an extended critique of *Chosen But Free*, see *The Potter's Freedom* by James White.

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