

Paul and the Power of Grace
March 14, 2023**Chapter 1 - Grace as a Gift**

For then just as for now, the word gift can take on innumerable meanings and understanding that can only be distinguished by cultural and/or social norms and as Barclay asserts context (2). As an example, money can be given as a “gift,” but specifically the “gift” could be a donation, a tip, an honorarium, etc. (2). Therefore, a simple word study is profoundly inadequate. Barclay immediately makes note of two important aspects of the Greek word *charis*, which is often translated as grace. First linguistically, *charis* (denotes “benefit, favor, or gift”) and Paul’s use of *charis* in conjunction with other “gift-terms” (1). In addition, how the various uses of the word are also reflective of cultural gift- giving practices in antiquity (something enticing or being in a position of favor with someone or the act of doing a favor). Further, it could also take on the meaning of a gift, a favor (as in an action) , something beneficial or the perceived benevolence of the giver. Finally, it could mean thanksgiving (1,2).

Barclay in developing his taxonomy of gifts (i.e., grace) three key ideals were essential: volunteerism, personal and most importantly goodwill (2,3). All three of these concepts are understood historically and culturally (3). Further, in most instances, the intrinsic to the idea and purpose of a gift is the initiation or maintenance of a “social relationship” (3). This idea is explored in greater detail in Barclay’s discussion of the anthropological and historical characteristics of *charis*. Barclay cites Marcel Mauss’ anthropological study of gifts, which noted the circular nature of gifting; specifically, the idea of an implied expected return to the giver to maintain the relationship (4).

In comparing the historical and cultural gifting norms, Barclay continues to explore this concept. The idea of reciprocity was basic to gifting in Paul's Greco-Roman culture in every social strata to such a degree that even gifts of "generosity" were seen as being placed in a position of indebtedness (5,6). Reciprocity was also embedded in their religion. The gods as benefactors expected sacrifices and worship in return for their provision and protection. In society, the wealthy expected honor or titles. Although the Jewish community was one characterized by "mutual service," the idea of reciprocity was also evident as attested to in Jewish wisdom texts (8). Even the Jewish cultural and religious belief in giving to the poor with no expectation of return had elements of reciprocity. According to Deuteronomy, the poor would 'bless' the giver (9). The general idea in this reciprocal way of thinking, especially in an incongruent relationship is that something had to be given in return, gratitude was included as a possibility (8). In modern Western thinking, the belief that you do not receive something for nothing (there is always expected reciprocity) is held in simultaneous juxtaposition idealizing as "pure" gifts giving with no expectation of return. Barclay points to Martin Luther and Immanuel Kant and Auguste Comte, who coined the phrase 'altruism,' as proponents of the idea of pure gifts without obligation, with Jacques Derrida, who took the idea to its "logical extreme." (10,11).

Chapter 2 - Perfections of Gift and Grace

Although there may be a consensus among theologians and interpreters regarding the significance of grace in Pauline writings, there is a general lack of consensus regarding Paul's meaning (18). In chapter two, Barclay offers his own taxonomy on how God's gift of grace is modified or perfected by theologians and interpreters in their quest to understand Paul. Barclay

addresses the apparent inherent proclivity of humanity to assign what he calls “perfection” to ideas or concepts. Sometimes this occurs in order to establish either its quintessential distinction or more in the case of theology, to establish a perceived interpretation as “the truth” (13,14). However, this is not necessarily the case in our own personal gift giving nor is it in the case of Paul who uses the concept “in antithetical terms” (13).

The perfection of grace can be viewed and expressed in a variety of ways and is dependent upon which component of the grace process is being referenced or examined. According to Barclay the components of the grace process includes a giver, a gift, and a recipient each of which can be a subject for perfection (13). Based upon his knowledge of gift giving practices in the Mediterranean world, Barclay has distilled the number of ways to six: Superabundance, Singularity, Priority, Incongruity, Efficacy and Noncircularity. However, in defining these six categories of grace perfection in relation to God, Barclay also emphasizes that none or some of these perceptions of perfecting grace are applicable to God. Rather, in some instances application can be problematic: i.e., singularity - God is not perceived as always benevolent in Hebrew or Christian Scriptures) Further, although not necessarily applied to God by biblical writers or interpreters, Barclay does acknowledge “gift-giving is always susceptible to one or more of these perfections” especially as it relates to God (17). When applied to God as a means of defining or ascertaining what is to be considered as true or pure grace, any number or combination thereof may be employed. For example, God’ grace could be characterized regarding priority and superabundance, but not incongruity (17).

Essentially what Barclay is highlighting is how these various definitions when applied by interpreters and theologians can still result in divergent assessments of God’s grace. However, by utilizing these six perfections, theologians will be able to identify how grace is being assessed

and thereby have a better understanding of how a theologian/interpreter is characterizing a particular understanding of grace (17). As an illustration, Marcion who was ultimately considered a heretic appears to have perfected Paul's writings on grace through the lens of Singularity, God as the quintessential benevolent good God. This understanding led Marcion to differentiate between the seemingly judgmental God of Hebrew Scripture and the loving, kind God of Paul and Jesus. The question was never about Paul's teaching on grace, but how the early church perfected it differently (19). In contrast, Augustine's approach to grace was far more "perfected" not just by Barclay's six categories, but also by including his own "theology of grace," which resulted centuries later with John Calvin's Reformed theology (20). Interestingly enough, Luther's strong view on the incongruity (and noncircularity) of God's grace did not lead him to heresy, but to the idea that we are both simultaneously sinner and justified (22). As the chapter's ending reiterates, Barclay's development of the terminology for grace allows for a more nuanced reading of Paul (23). Moreover, although it may not change a theologian or scholar's interpretation, it does provide grounds or a framework for insightful understanding and a productive discourse.

Chapter 3 - Paul, Grace and Second Temple Judaism

Barclay examines the concept of grace in Second Temple Judaism. A historical framework of theology is laid as a foundation to understand the changed perspective regarding the theology of grace (still undefined or perfected) and works. Up until the E.P. Sanders' seminal work on grace does not work in Second Temple Judaism, the traditional theological view, established by Robert Bultmann, was that Judaism was a religious system of works. Although Barclays asserts that based upon Sanders research this line of thinking is no longer justifiable it is still taught in many churches today.

Five Articles by Dr. Shellrude

Sanders's research evidenced that salvation for Jews was a result of God's *prior* not works. God's grace was "*prior* to any requirement of Torah-observance" (24). Further, Sanders advanced that although Paul's soteriology was Christ centered "there was no difference with regard to grace and works..." (26). For Paul just as the Jews "entered into the community of the save" by grace, so did the Gentiles (25,26). Further, Barclay attests that Paul's strong stance on the doctrine of justification by faith was restricted to the defense of Gentiles as rightful recipients of God's promises (27). However, here as in chapters one and two, the question of what is meant by grace remains the crux of the discussion. Barclay explains in Sanders' approach to his research, he "emphasized the *priority* of God's grace," which he assumed included *incongruity* (28). This of course brings us full circle to Barclay's point, what do we mean by grace and the necessity for establishing his six point classification for perfecting grace.

To further illustrate his premise, Barclay presents four Second Temple writings ranging from 200 BCE to 100 CE, *Wisdom of Solomon*, writings by Philo of Alexandria, Qumran Hymns and *4Ezra*. Even though each selected text refers to God's grace or mercy, each one also does so in varying contexts and applications (according to Barclay's taxonomy(29). In the *Wisdom of Solomon* grace is superabundant and prior. In Philo's writings; superabundant, singular and prior. In Qumran Hymns; incongruity and in 4 Ezra, superabundant, singular and prior. As Barclay concludes, grace is found in Second Temple Judaism, but it is not the same grace. When examining text is not enough to ask if grace is present, the essential question is what or which grace. It is impossible to have an intelligent conversation without the agreement of language and terms.

Chapter 7 - The Incongruous Gift and Its Fitting Result (Romans 1-5)

In Romans, Paul expresses God's grace as incongruous in the sense that both Christian Jew and Christian Gentile are both without inherent merit and have only been brought into the community of the saved by God's grace (Romans 3: 22b - 23a). Therefore, neither camp has reason to boast or to entertain a sense of superiority or as Barclay states, "in the absence of worth" because 'all have sinned' (76, 82). Further, God's incongruent grace is transformative. The essence of God's grace is in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the resurrection the "power of the Spirit" enabled life to be created out of nothingness (death) and thereby also "forming" a new identity to all who faithfully believe (77). The concept of new identity in light of transformation is also discussed relative to the 'righteousness of God' (78,79). This transformation includes Christian Jew and Christian Gentile alike. In an explanation of judgment, Barclay uses the phrase "Spirit transformed lives" to describe the position of Christian Jew and Christian Gentile (80).

Paul explicates his concept of grace using a number ofIn explicating the concept of grace, Paul uses a number of gift-terminology such as charis; charisma; dorea; dorema as well as "related terms [such as] love and mercy (77). As I read this section, it made me wonder if Paul was trying to create his own type of perfecting grace taxonomy and perhaps we have yet to understand the categories. Barclay's intent in this chapter is to identify his grace taxonomy in Paul's perfection of grace (78). Of the six categories, Paul perfects grace as primarily incongruent (unaffected by the worth or inexhaustible capacity to sin), efficacious (in its power over sin), and superabundant (77,78). Barclay does not see Paul's perfection of grace in singularity or noncircularity . I am assuming that the idea of priority is understood (78).

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Abraham's faith and trust in God is the source and the vehicle by which he became the father to the nations (Jew and Gentile). Abraham's "absolute dependence on God" is the exemplar and the replication of the faith that can only be a reality as a result of God's incongruent grace (84). Further, just as there was nothing in Abraham's life that indicated any value or worthiness, there is nothing in the lives of the church in Rome (or ours). As Barclay concludes, this incongruent grace is "unconditioned," but not 'unconditional " and" free " but not without the expectation of transformation (87).

#1 - All Are Elect, Few Are Elect: Understanding NT Election Language - Dr. Shellrude

The premise of Dr. Shellrude's article is that God's election is predicated upon the concept of God's "*gracious initiative*," which is God's enabling ability for humanity to accept His divine invitation to be included in the family of God. Election then becomes all those "who say yes" (145). Further, in opposition to the Calvinist tradition of predetermination, Dr. Shellrude argues that the biblical text on election nowhere implies that a person's unbelief is the result of not being selected by God (145). Additionally, inherent in the concept of "*gracious initiative*" is God's unconditional, gratuitous love for humanity.

Dr. Shellrude premise is intended to be offered in contrast to the theological interpretation of election (i.e., selection) as approached by traditional Arminian-Wesleyans (God's foreknowledge of those who will believe), contemporary Arminian-Wesleyans: (those who become "incorporated into the kingdom of God" after believing) and Calvinists (God's predetermined selection of individuals). Further, Dr. Shellrude contends both Arminian-Wesleyan approaches have "significant problems" (142). However, based upon "two widely attested theological affirmations, namely, God's desire for all to be saved and the reality of apostasy; the Calvinist interpretation is deemed as "implausible" (143). It is in light of the implausibility of the Calvinistic approach that Dr. Shellrude presents several supporting arguments for *gracious initiative*. Due to space limitations, only the supportive arguments will be listed and not the Calvinists doctrines they address.

It is important to understand that Dr. Shellrude also argues that the use of Old Testament election language in a New Testament setting in wise means or suggests any type of "non-selection" (147, 148). New Election language seems to take on an identifying *who you are now based upon your faithful, yes*; not the rejection or non-selection of others. Dr. Shellrude first

asserts, as the object of God's *gracious initiative*, Israel was selected out of all the other nations. This Old Testament idea of election helped form the election language used by both Jesus and the early Church who then applied it to New Testament soteriology (146). In keeping this Old Testament perspective, Calvinist have failed to recognize that the object of God's gracious initiative was no longer nation based nor defined by ethnicity but "is now universal in scope" (146). God's people (or the community of the save as Barclay characterized in a previous chapter) is now defined as those who by faith respond to God's invitation to the Gospel (147).

Additionally, although God does love all the world and this love is universal, the ones who respond by faith now have God's special love and a relationship made only available to them (147). Further, this special relationship includes the idea of "adoption," "called" "beloved" and of course "elected" which is now reflective of the believers status (147). Similarly, soteriological language in the New Testament, such as reconciliation, justification, salvation, etc has also expanded to include all those who respond by faith (149). It is also important to consider the fact that scriptural metaphors and analogies do not always have a one to one analogy with human experience. Specifically, the scriptural idea/metaphor of inheritance, heir and adoption have almost an opposite meaning. As an example, theologically the opportunity for adoption is unrestrictive, non-selective, but is universally available (150).

Finally, evidencing New Testament texts (Gospel of John and Matthew, Ephesians, Colossians, Romans and Petrine texts), Dr. Shellrude confirms the credibility and validity of his premises. In all cases, the broad perspective of election on the basis of *gracious initiative* could be easily interpreted. This includes overcoming objections to passages such as Romans 11:5-7, which plain sight reading may be perceived to be advocating selected election (154). Dr. Shellrude also highlights the reality of apostasy on the part of believers. The believer elects (my

word) to reject God not the other way around (156). The article concludes with reaffirming that the New Testament election language is one of universality based upon God's gracious initiative (159).

#2 - Imputation in Pauline Theology: Christ's Righteousness or a Justified Status?

Dr. Shellrude asserts that believers are not declared justified as a result of the imputation of Christ's righteousness; rather by the act of Christ's sacrificial atonement. However, this has not always nor is it currently an uncontested doctrine. Traditionally, Calvin, Luther, Arminius and initially Wesley supported the theology that included in Christ's atonement was the believer being "clothed" in the resulting righteousness. Now "clothed" in the righteousness of Christ, the believer stands before God as righteous, which then becomes the basis of justification (18, 19). The focus of the article is to examine Righteousness versus Justification in light of Pauline text. It is interesting to note according to Dr. Shellrude many contemporary Pauline scholars do not address this issue, but elect to interpret Paul's justification theology without making any acknowledgement of imputation of righteousness through Christ (20).

At the center of the debate is the use and understanding of the Greek word *dikaiosune*, Dr. Shellrude states "describes a gift given to or received by the one who has faith in Jesus" (20,21). However, Paul uses *dikaiosune* in two very divergent ways and must be understood within the context of the specific passage. At times, Paul uses *dikaiosune* as a state or position of moral righteousness and at others to describe a believer's soteriological status as acquitted (20). Dr. Shellrude emphasizes the importance in understanding the difference as paramount to seeing the soteriological aspect of *dikaiosune*. It is critical to the understanding of Pauline theology of justification to use proper exegesis (29).

The article continues with an explication of Paul's use of *dikaiosune* from a soteriological perspective. In responding to objections, Dr. Shellrude contends Paul's comparison of Adam's transgression against Christ atonement in Romans 5:12-19 is a comparison of how each affected humanity. Paul in his argument does not address the "mechanics" or how humanity was impacted.

(22). This is a nuanced, yet significant distinction. If Paul were discussing the how or means by which Adam and Christ affected humanity in this comparison, the discussion would take on completely different meaning and in my opinion would not be relevant or perhaps even obfuscate Paul's intended argument of soteriological acquittal. Additionally, it is also important to note that Paul also uses the varying noun forms as well as the verb form of *dikaiosune* both synonymously and interchangeably as evidenced in Romans 5:16-18 and Galatians 2:15 (21, 23). Further, it is also important to note in these instances as well as others Paul's intended use of *dikaiosune* is that of a gift (23,24). God's response to the believer who comes to God in faith, is the "gift of a justified or acquitted status" (24).

Paul further develops the concept of justification as a gift unrelated to works or actions by the recipient in his account of Abraham's imputation of justification not moral righteousness and David's exclamation of blessings for those who "God credits/imputes *dikaiosune*. In this passage there is the idea of imputation, but it is again the gift of justification/acquittal not moral righteousness (24). The repeated key to understanding *dikaiosune* as justification is to examine all the ways that Paul uses the word (and varying forms) in other passages. However, this can sometimes be difficult to assess when Paul writes in "cryptic, shorthand expressions" as he does in 2 Corinthians 5:21 (26)

In conclusion, Dr. Shellrude asserts, as a result of translators failing to distinguish Paul's various use of *dikaiosune* (and its variant forms) by translating it as righteousness with a sense of moral imputation, a "significant disservice" has been done to the Church. This is especially noted when failing to successfully interpret Paul's use of imputation imagery. Paul's imputation imagery points to soteriology status (as a gift from God or something coming from God) not moral righteousness (28). Moreover, it is imperative to differentiate when Paul actually does use *dikaiosune* as moral righteousness it is not associated with Christ's righteousness (28). The technicality of language aside, the understanding that God "sees our sin with utter clarity," yet "chooses to forgive us" and in doing so transforms us by his lovingkindness and tender mercy.

#3 - My Problem with Calvinism (Summary) - Dr. Shellrude William Lane Craig's Critique of Theological Determinism

This article is a seventeen point summary of Dr. Shellrude's arguments against Calvinism and a five point critique of theological Calvinism by William Lane Craig. Dr. Shellrude asserts the idea of determinism was introduced by Augustine circa 400 AD and is related more to Stoic philosophy than Scripture derived. It is to be noted that prior to Augustine's assertions determination was not a topic of discussion or debate by previous theologians or the early church. Additionally, from a theological historical perspective, there is no indication or writings in Second Temple Judaism attesting this idea nor was determinism taught by Jesus or the early Church (1,2).

Based upon the "preponderance" of biblical scriptures and passages that prescribe to the same five principles of free will, God's grace as resistible, universality of salvation, the scope of atonement and the reality of apostasy, Calvinists exegesis of scripture is not supported. Dr. Shellrude contends that Calvinism is not founded on sound exegetical study. Rather, it is based upon isolated passages taken out of context and that Calvinists have had to employ "counter

intuitive” “interpretive strategies” of scriptures to support their theology (1). By insisting everything including human thought is ordained by God (good or bad, correct or absurd), the possibility of ever ascertaining knowledge is impossible. How can you tell what is real or accurate knowledge (1)? This also means that God also has ordained evil as well as the evil acts of individuals. Yet, then holds humanity accountable for acts of evil. Since all is God’s will, God will also bring forces together, so an individual is guaranteed to sin (1). This understanding completely negates and “renders meaningless” all scriptures and references to the goodness, lovingkindness, mercy etc. of God. Yet, paradoxically, humanity is expected to be holy, loving, kind, etc. In essence, humanity has a higher moral code than God (1). As a final point, Dr. Shellrude addresses specific points that challenge determinism “ exegetically, logically and ethically” (2).

Although William L. Craig’s article addresses classical Reformed divines, it similarly echoes Dr. Shellrude’s issues with Reformed Calvinism. Craig states that “classical Reformed divines” acknowledge that elements of their doctrine , specifically regarding human freedom to choose, are “inscrutable” and cites the works of D. A. Carson (3). Craig concurs that in making God the source and ordainer of evil actions, it also makes God evil Himself and humanity’s accountability is nullified. Of the five points, the most striking is Craig's challenge that determinism “makes reality into a farce” (3). Since there free human agency does not exist, since God is the creator and ordainer of every single aspect in this world, in essence this world is nothing more than a huge stage for divine play acting.

#4 - Calvinism and Problematic Readings of New Testament Texts - Dr. Shellrude

At the heart of Calvinism is the understanding that libertarian freedom in humanity does not exist. Any choice, good (in agreement with God) or bad (in rebellion against God) is God initiated and God ordained (70). The theological implications of this premise are explored in scriptures related to salvation and perseverance from a Calvinist perspective. However, due to the scope and length of this assignment and the number of scriptures examined, only a few scripture and topic headings will be referenced.

The general presumption is that when these scriptures attesting to any of the ten subheadings; some of which are: *Moral Exhortation in the New Testament, God's Purposes for the Believer, God's Daily Work in the Life of the Believer, Critique of the Sins of the Believer and Warnings to the Believer*) can only be clearly understood in light of God's gift of grace to obey and free will. However, when these scriptures are read within the circumscribed theology of determinism, they will only be obeyed because of God's granting or withholding His irresistible grace (71).

As an example, individuals are incapable of fulfilling God's purpose (glorifying God, doing good works or conforming to God's image) according to scripture (Ephesians 1:2, 2:9, Romans 8:29) unless determined by God (72). The skewed rationality of determinist theology is highlighted in scriptures in 1 and 2 Corinthians. If the issues of the Corinthian Church that required Paul's intervention were ordained and arranged by God, then God is responsible for the sinful acts of the church, gifting Paul the ability to respond, but not necessarily enabling all Corinthians to comply (73). while only allowing and only gave some the ability to comply. The

the paradoxical nature of determinism is also highlighted as it relates to scriptures that warn those identified as believers against false teaching, false prophets, Judaizers, etc. (74). Again, God warns yet it is God who determines who will succumb! Similarly, there are several instances where believers with divergent understandings are given instruction or guidance on how to come in agreement. Yet God who is also described as not being the author of confusion is theoretically the very source of that confusion.

The paper concludes with several observations some of which are found in Dr. Shellrude's summary of points in *My Problem with Calvinism*. In one particularly critical observation, Dr. Shellrude characterizes reading Scripture within a Calvinistic framework as deceptive. God's promises appear to be universal in scope, while knowing that they only apply to some. God speaks of "His moral will for humanity," while orchestrating evil and destruction (81). As explained by Dr. Shellrude, in Calvinist theology, God has a revealed or visible will that operates simultaneously with His "ordaining will" (81). Using a rather disturbing example, Dr. Shellrude compares the discrepancy in logic between God's revealed will and His ordaining will as it relates to abused children (81). On a lighter note, Dr. Shellrude questions the dichotomy of logic that would have God's desire for relationship with His creation being satisfied with a people who are only following their predetermined programming (84).

**# The Freedom of God in Mercy and Judgement:
a Libertarian reading of Romans 9:6-29 - Glen Shellrude**

The understanding of Romans 9:6-29 is dependent upon recognizing that it is to be interpreted within the greater context of Paul's arguments in chapters 9-11. Paul's cryptic points regarding God's mercy, hardening Israel's heart and analogy to a potter and clay requires the broader context for clearer interpretation (306). Interpretation is additionally problematic because this passage is frequently done so within a Calvinistic framework, which is that Israel's

heart was intentionally hardened to fulfill the purposes of God (306). Dr. Shellrude begins his argument by examining the content and interpretations in chapters 9:30-10:21, 11:19-24 as if Paul were writing from a determinist position, addressing the resulting ensuing challenges and then dispelling the argument (308). The probable issue in Dr. Shellrude's estimation is the Jewish question of God's failure to Israel. If Jesus is the Messiah, then why did not God make certain that the Jews would believe in Him (309)?

In response, Dr. Shellrude proposes an interpretation of Romans 9:6b -13 based upon Paul's "implied intended response to the above question. The assertion is made that God is free to decide that faith in Jesus is a determinant for salvation and is not obligated to a specific ethnicity, "the physical descendants of Abraham, free to respond to Jewish unbelief with hardening and use it as He deems appropriate while showing mercy (309, 310). Membership into the people of God is still dependent upon God's "gracious initiative" and as such it is grace not lineage that remains the determining factor (310,311). The next implied question is found in Romans 9:14-18, 'Is God unjust?'(312) Here Paul uses God's judgment against Pharaoh as an analogy. Once again Paul is alluding to God's freedom to judge Israel's heart similarly and use it as He did Pharaoh's, but in this instance it is to proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles as well as show mercy (313).

Finally, in Romans 9:19-24, Paul addresses the question of individual accountability in contrast to what has been perceived as divine determination. In using the imagery/metaphor of the potter and the jar, it would appear that Paul is affirming a determinist argument. However, the crux in ascertaining Paul's intent is found in his "introductory formula" of what if (314). Dr. Shellrude asserts that Paul is not characterizing God as the potter and humanity as the clay, rather the comparison is meant to highlight the overarching understanding of God's patience

with “one group” so that God’s salvation can be known to “another”(315). Additionally, Dr. Shellrude notes the significant lack of parallel comparison between the two groups in the metaphor. As noted, Paul does not say nor indicate that the vessels of wrath had been prepared in advance for their ultimate destruction (315). It is necessary to read all of Romans 9-11 to see the full picture of Paul’s intent. Unbelieving Jews are currently in a state of unbelief on their own because of their unbelief in Jesus as Messiah. Therefore, this state of unbelief can and will change based upon their acceptance to “God’s free initiative in Christ” (315).

What is most compelling in this section of the article is understanding the potter and clay motif. Dr. Shellrude contends that in using this motif, Paul is demonstrating two important factors. God does not act out of obligation, but out of His grace and mercy (316). Since God’s election is based upon his “prior decision to invite us into the gloryprepared for those who respond to his grace,” then determinism is not pre-election, but pre-decision. God’s predetermination is his pre-decision to accept all. As the King James version of Scripture writes it is to the “whomsoever.” Additionally, regarding the salvific fidelity of God, Dr. Shellrude points out that it is possible to read Romans 3:3-4 as “in principle it is possible for the entire world to choose unbelief, and this would not in any way compromise the faithfulness of God” (317). God is sovereign and free to extend mercy to those who receive His gracious initiative and to judge accordingly those who elect not to accept.