



## Desperate Assurance: History of Limited Atonement: Bèza's Development of Supralapsarianism, Assurance by Works, & Sanctification by Works

- 7- Since the original publication of Kendall's book in 1981, those of the limited atonement camp have sought to discredit his research. In the Preface of his New Edition, Kendall answers his critics:

*Kendall, Calvin and English Calvinism, v.*

'A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.' Even if I answered my critics line by line the "Yes, but" syndrome would not close down. I must say that I have yet to read a refutation of my research that was done by one who had no aspirations along traditional Reformed lines.

- 8- What Kendall did discover is that the limited atonement view was developed in Calvin's name after his death by his protégé and successor, Theodore Bèza \BEE-za\. This is exposed by Kendall in chapter two of his book, "Theodore Bèza and the Heidelberg Theologians" (pp. 29-41).
- 1) Fundamental in the development of Bèza's doctrine was the belief that Christ died for the elect only.
  - 2) This means that those individuals who were elected in eternity past are the *only ones* for whom Christ died. All others are said to be "reprobate." These were brought into existence with no hope of salvation and are left to die in their sins.
  - 3) Kendall summarizes this view: those for whom Christ died must necessarily be saved; those for whom He did not die must necessarily be damned (p. 29).
  - 4) Bèza therefore takes the death of Christ, which is summed up by the word "atonement," and links it with the doctrine of election in such a way that election predetermines one's salvation.
  - 5) From this concept Bèza developed a system that later became known as supralapsarianism.
  - 6) This term is not as complicated as it appears. The prefix *supra-* means "above, over, or before." In the middle is the word "lapse" which comes for the Latin word *lapsus*, meaning "fall." The two suffixes at the end are *-ian* and *-ism*. The former refers to those who believe in the principle that man is fallen. The latter indicates that it constitutes a belief system or a doctrine. Therefore, if you believe in the doctrine that mankind is "fallen" then you are a lapsarian and you are a proponent of lapsarianism.
  - 7) Bèza's system contends that when in eternity past God sovereignly determined how He would deal with the eternal future of the human race, He decreed to elect a few to salvation but not all.
  - 8) Bèza further contended that if God's elective decrees were placed in a logical order then the act of election would occur before His decision to permit the fall. Thus, Bèza's system became known as supralapsarianism: he believed the doctrine of the fall but asserted that logically election occurred *before* the fall.

### The Supralapsarian Order of the Elective Decrees

- 1- The decree to elect some to be saved and to reprobate all others.



- 2- The decree to create men, both elect and non-elect.
- 3- The decree to permit the fall.
- 4- The decree to provide salvation for the elect.
- 5- The decree to apply salvation to the elect.

- 9) Note that according to Bèza, the decrees of election and reprobation occur first and thus have logical priority over the decrees to create mankind and permit the fall.
- 10) The decree to elect some to be saved and to reprobate all others results in the doctrine of double predestination: men, not yet created, are predetermined for either heaven or the lake of fire and human free will is not a substantial consideration.
- 11) Note the heresy: some men not yet created and not yet fallen are condemned by the justice of God! These so-called “reprobates” are not candidates for redemption because Christ did not die for their sins.
- 12) Another inconsistency: the elect are said to be redeemed before they are created and before they fall. But redemption can only apply to those who are fallen!
- 13) Nevertheless, Bèza contends that God through Christ, saves the elect only. The death of Christ on the cross becomes the means of saving the elect, not the faith of the individual.
- 14) Bèza interprets Ephesians 1:4 to mean that since election occurred in eternity past then salvation of the elect is an accomplished fact. (p. 32)
- 15) Problem: How does the elected person know of his election and thus have assurance of his salvation?
- 16) Unlimited atonement asserts that Christ died for all mankind. Thus when the sinner expresses his personal faith in Christ he may surely know that he is saved.
- 17) But under the principle of limited atonement, the sinner has no way of knowing whether or not he is among those for whom Christ died. The resultant dilemma is evaluated by Kendall:

Bèza has told us Christ died for the elect. This makes trusting Christ's death presumptuous: we could be putting our trust in One who did not die for us and therefore be damned. Thus we can no more trust Christ's death by a direct act of faith than we can infallibly project that we are among the number chosen from eternity: for the number of the elect and the number for whom Christ died are one and the same. The ground of assurance, then, must be sought elsewhere than in Christ. (See Kendall, p. 32)

- 18) Since Christ's atoning sacrifice was limited to a predetermined few, no individual may look to Christ for assurance about his eternal future. Bèza understood the quandary his theology created but, undaunted, he came up with a solution.

Bèza, Theodore. *A Briefe and Piththie Summe of the Christian Faith*. (1565?), 36, 37:

[NOTE: Bèza's sixteenth-century spelling is modernized.]



When Satan puts you in doubt of our election, we may not search first the eternal counsel of god whose majesty we cannot comprehend, but on the contrary we must begin at the **sanctification which we feel in ourselves** ... forasmuch as our sanctification, from which proceeds good works, is a certain effect of Jesus Christ dwelling in us by faith. (See Kendall, p. 33)

- 19) Under Bèza's system, faith in Christ plays no major role in the salvation of the elect, but faith in one's "good works" is essential and even primary in ascertaining whether or not he is one of the elect.
- 20) Consequently, the object of his assurance is not the work of Christ on the cross but rather his own "good works." If a person has expressed faith in Christ he does not rely upon biblical assurances that he has eternal life. Instead, he reaches a subjective opinion about this based on a personal evaluation of his "good works."
- 21) These "good works" prove to the person that he is sanctified and that Jesus Christ indwells him. Consequently, "good works" are the proof that one's faith in Christ was efficacious.
- 22) From this came the development of syllogisms:

Baldick, Chris. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 218:

**Syllogism**, a form of logical argument that derives a conclusion from two propositions sharing a common term, usually in this form: all *x* are *y* (major premise); *z* is *x* (minor premise); therefore *z* is *y* (conclusion). In this deductive logic, the conclusion is of course reliable only if both premises are true.

- 23) In order to formalize his "solution" to the question, "How can I know that I am among the elect and therefore that my faith was efficacious for salvation?" Bèza developed a syllogism:

Major premise: All who have the effects (good works) have faith.

Minor premise: But I have the effects (good works).

Conclusion: Therefore I have faith. (See Kendall, p. 33)

- 24) It is important that we discredit this immediately. Both the premises are false. I will demonstrate. The word "faith" is the translation of the Greek noun, **πίστις, pistis**. The verb form is, **πιστεύω, pisteuō**, and is translated "believe." The definitions of these two words are obviously synonymous:

Arndt, William F. and F. Wilber Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. 2d ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 660-62:

**πιστεύω, [pisteuō]** 1. To believe in something; to be **convinced** of something. The person to whom one gives credence: Jesus and God whom one *believes*, in that he accepts their disclosures **without doubt or contradiction**.

2. Faith in the Divinity that lays special emphasis on **trust** in his power and his nearness to help, in addition to being **convinced** that he exists and that his revelations or disclosures are **true**. In our literature, God and Christ are **objects** of this faith.



**πίστις, [pistis]** 2. Trust and confidence directed toward God and Christ, their revelations, teachings, promises, and their power and readiness to aid.

- 25) Both the noun and the verb are transitive. The merit is found in the object not the subject. The person who believes places his confidence for salvation in an object that he is certain is qualified to accomplish the desired effect: salvation and eternal life.
- 26) Jesus Christ is the only person qualified to accomplish this desired effect and this is stated repeatedly in Scripture.
- 27) Bèza's syllogism reveals that he was unable to find confidence in his salvation without placing confidence in his "good works." In effect, he places his faith in his works to verify his faith in Christ.
- 28) However, faith by its definition asserts that the one possessing it is absolutely convinced that the Word of God is true regarding Christ as Savior. Further, one is also convinced that by believing in the Person and work of Christ, he is indeed saved, among the elect, and with eternal life.
- 29) The definitions of **πίστις, pistis** and **πιστεύω, pisteuō**, unite the concepts of faith and assurance: if you believe in Christ for salvation then you believe in the promises that are attached to salvation: forgiveness of presalvation sins, salvation, and eternal life.
- 30) Bèza's system does not agree with this. In fact, he is on record saying that there are two "works of grace": (1) The "first grace" which is faith in Christ and (2) the "second grace" which is sanctification.
- 31) He teaches that the first grace is rendered void if it is not ratified by the second. It is the second grace which assures, for the first grace may not persevere. (See Kendall, p. 35)
- 32) According to Bèza, sanctification is the effect that is caused by saving faith. For Bèza, "sanctification" has to do with the performance of "good works."
- 33) "Sanctification" is the Greek word **ἁγιασμός, hagiastos** and means "to be set apart for special service" to God, but there are three categories of sanctification in the Bible:
  1. Positional sanctification which occurs at the moment of salvation by means of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
  2. Experiential sanctification which refers to the spiritual growth of the believer all the way through the sophisticated spiritual life.
  3. Ultimate sanctification which is the perfection of the eternal state in resurrection body.
- 37) Biblically, the only way that experiential sanctification can have its intended results is for positional sanctification to occur first.



- 38) Bèza recognizes this but, instead of finding assurance from the biblical promises that salvation and eternal life are given to anyone who believes in Jesus Christ, he seeks to confirm these by the presence of “good works.” He calls this sanctification but he is obviously referring to “experiential sanctification.”
- 39) In effect the spiritual life of the hyper-Calvinist becomes an experiment that seeks to determine whether or not he is saved. The individual begins to observe his own life in order to discern whether he will produce good works and thus confirm his election or on the other hand fall away and confirm his reprobation.
- 40) The word “experiment” is used to describe the approach of the hyper-Calvinist simply because it is the word utilized by the followers of Bèza, in particular William Perkins, a contemporary of Bèza’s. Perkins’s writings on the subject are mind boggling in their assertions.

*Kendall, Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649, 8:*

It is crucial to grasp Perkins’s doctrine of **temporary faith** of the reprobate. In 1589 he wrote a treatise that codified this idea. [It] begins with the assumption of the **inalterable decree** of reprobation ... a warning to professing Christians to **examine themselves** lest they happen to possess but a **temporary faith**—a lofty position to which the **reprobate**, though doomed from the start, **may attain**.

The **non-elect may excel**, though damned all the while, in the certain **fruits of the elect**; this comes about by what [Perkins] calls **ineffectual calling**, a term he borrows from Bèza. The ineffectual calling of the non-elect is none the less so powerful that the subject manifests **all the appearances of the elect**: such as zeal, good works, **even sanctification**. A sincere Christian could well fear he was but reprobate.

- 41) There are several passages that are cited by Bèza and Perkins for these ideas. We will note one:

**Matthew 13:3** - Jesus spoke many things to them in parables, saying, “Behold, the sower went out to sow;

**v. 4** - and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up.

**v. 5** - “And others fell upon the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil.

**v. 6** - “But when the sun had risen they were scorched and because they had no root, they withered away.

**v. 7** - “And other fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out.

**v.8** - “And others fell on good soil, and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.”

- 42) Bèza and Perkins conclude that the only believers in this parable are illustrated by those seeds that landed on good soil, i.e., the elect. Consequently, they naturally produced a crop. The others were all unbelievers because there never was any production of fruit.



- 43) However, the only seeds that did not germinate were those that fell beside the road. Those that fell on rocky places and among the thorns germinated and grew to a certain degree but never produced fruit due to lack of growth, or doctrine. Nevertheless, they were saved.
  
- 44) However, when the thesis contends that the only way to verify saving faith is by means of works then those who fail to produce fruit are judged as reprobates.