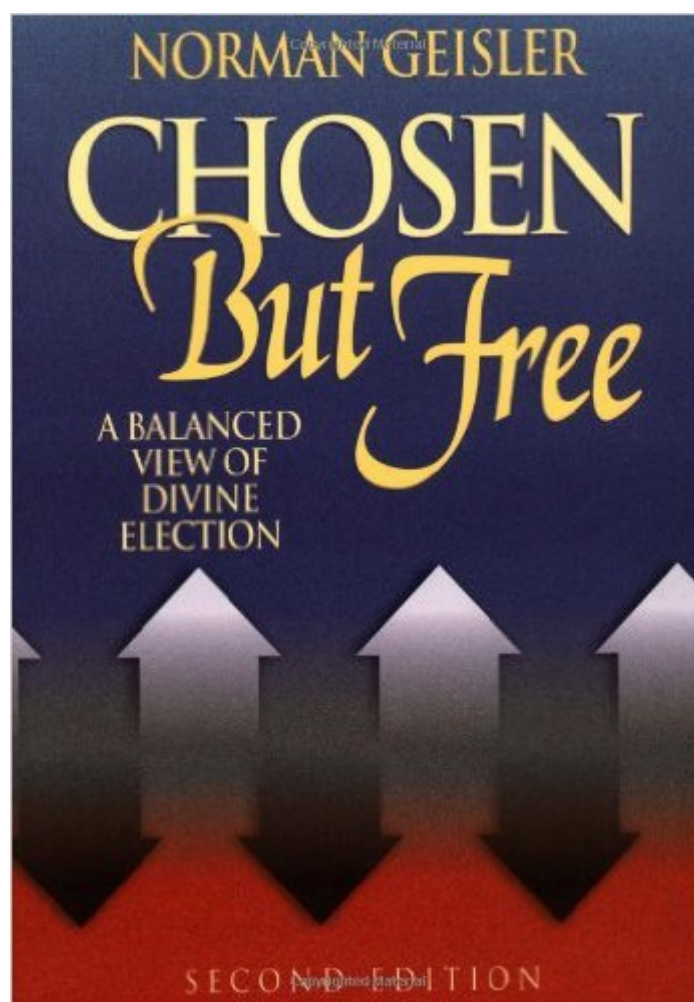


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# Chosen But Free



## Synopsis

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.

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## Customer Reviews

The differences between Calvinism and Arminianism have been debated even before Calvin and Arminius. From Augustine to Pelagius to now Geisler and White, the issue of sovereignty versus free will has been debated. In fact, to say that this is an emotionally-charged issue is, quite frankly, an understatement. Geisler, a scholar who has written many of the books sitting on my shelves, attempts to take a moderate position. He "chooses" the best of Calvinism and mixes the ideas with some of the more appealing Arminian ideas. Needless to say, this formula has pretty much riled up the Calvinists (look at all the one-star reviews written before mine, which is not only unkind but truly unfair), and, in an uncanny way, made the Arminians rejoice. They apparently are touting this book

as a complete refutation against Calvinism, yet do they they fail to see that Geisler in effect refutes Arminianism in its pure form? Such an interesting dual reaction! Several things ought to be known when reading this book: 1) Realize that this is not the last word on the issue. The first cannon shot back was fired by Calvinist James R. White in *The Potter's Freedom*, who it must be acknowledged did point out several problems with Geisler's view. It too should be read to get a more complete picture. 2) Whether you consider yourself a Calvinist or Arminian, you ought to take an "open view" when reading this book first (and then *Potter's Freedom*). Try to leave your presuppositions at the door and let the writers do their best to convince you of their positions. 3) Realize that *The Potter's Freedom* enjoyed the "last word" on this subject as it had the chance to attack Geisler's views without a chance of rejoinder. Therefore, I call upon both James White and Norman Geisler to come together for the last segment of a "trilogy" and put together a book that gives a chance of response for each position. This would be more fair. 4) Above all, let Christian charity reign. We have too many battles out there--a world that needs Jesus, whether you are Calvinist or Arminian--to spill so much blood on what has to be considered a secondary, or peripheral, issue. Sure, this issue is very important, but which camp would say that they cannot fellowship with those who belong to the other "side"? Please, let's not turn this issue into the definition of what makes a person a Christian. Again, I recommend that the two books are read and debated in your own mind and within your own circles. If you are like me, this will require you to do some very heady thinking. Geisler and White may certainly stretch many of your preconceived notions, if you will allow them to do so. And I think you will be a better Christian for it.

I read this book in researching my own book on the Arminian/Calvinist debate. I needed to read a book that defined and defended the Arminian perspective--and I heard Geisler was the man to read. My information was correct. Articulate and brilliant, Geisler presented several concepts and ideas that brought me up short and made me think about the answers in a way I'd never done before. Though he calls himself a "moderate Calvinist," in most cases his beliefs are more of a modified Arminian in my opinion. The implication is that he has found that perfect balance between the Arminian and Calvinist perspective--perhaps he IS somewhere in the middle, but the way he reads into a passage instead of seeing the clear meaning from out of certain important passages still has him coming just short of a complete, biblical interpretation. This book is well worth reading, but I remain unmoved in my original stance. I may not share his system of belief, but I'm very impressed with Norman Geisler.

In some ways, this book was tough for me to review. I consider myself to be of a Reformed theological bent and knew going in that I would likely disagree with Geisler's book. However, I have long had great respect for Geisler and have personally profited a great deal from a number of his writings in apologetics and Bibliology. I wanted to give this book as fair a hearing as I could give it, given my own admitted theological biases, and I suppose it is up to other reviewers and interested onlookers here as to whether this review succeeds in that effort. There are a couple of places where I thought CBF was good. I thought that the first chapter on God's sovereignty was well in order and a good way to lead off the book. I also felt that Geisler's critique of open theism (he calls it neotheism) was very good as well. Given Geisler's theological persuasion, I have great respect for the fact that Geisler has been one of the leading voices to speak out against open theism. It's easy for a five point Calvinist to come out strongly against open theism, since it is almost a complete rejection of Reformed theology in favor of an elevated man/reduced God theology. I would imagine that it's probably much more difficult for non-Calvinists or 'moderate Calvinists' as Geisler likes to define himself, to do the same thing since Arminians are clearly more sympathetic to liberationism even though many do not go that far. Having said this, however, Geisler's book has many severe weaknesses in it that compel me to the low review I've given it. First, and perhaps most devastating, is that Geisler's book is mostly devoid of any in-depth exegesis of Scripture. There is a lot of Scripture quoting, but not a lot of exegesis. Geisler's reputation is one of being an outstanding philosopher, a Thomistic philosopher in particular. Therefore, one of the charges that has been leveled at CBF is that Geisler is imposing his philosophy on Scripture, rather than letting Scripture drive his philosophy. Unfortunately, I am inclined to concur with this criticism in regards to this book. This book is simply not exegetically driven, and that is a huge weakness. As Geisler should well know, anyone can rattle off Scripture verses to try and support one's view. That doesn't mean that Scripture actually supports that view. An honest examination of what Scripture teaches must include the kind of exegesis that gets below the surface and attempts to seriously interact with the text. Throughout CBF, I detected a 'mile wide, inch deep' approach to Scriptural examination which I found highly disappointing. Second, Geisler's handling of Reformed scholars and writings in CBF is both highly selective and inaccurate. Geisler makes a habit here of quoting from secondary sources rather than dealing directly with the material he apparently disagrees with. Further, when he did cite primary sources, he tended to do this in an incomplete manner that raises serious contextual problems with the validity of his scholarship here. In particular, Geisler's treatment of Spurgeon's thought was excessively cannibalistic in this regard. Third, Geisler's use of terminology is problematic. Particularly revealing was toward the end of the book when he attempted to contrast

'extreme Calvinism' with the 'moderate Calvinism' he claims to hold. I found it quite amazing that what he was calling moderate Calvinism looked an awful lot like 4 point Arminianism, with Geisler only dissenting from mainstream Arminianism on the issue of eternal security. Being of a Reformed persuasion myself, I tried to give Geisler the benefit of the doubt on this and tried to see if his theology was in fact something other than Arminianism. But then I read what was perhaps the most revealing chapter of the book, which was his critique of 'extreme Arminianism'. I felt that surely, if Geisler is in fact a moderate Calvinist, we would see it here. But in fact, what Geisler calls 'extreme Arminianism' is open theism. Now while he was certainly correct to reject this view, he does not touch Arminianism. And I think the reason is clear - he can't criticize what he himself subscribes to. I was still prepared to give the book 3 stars until I read the appendix which details his response to *The Potter's Freedom* by James White. Frankly, I felt that this response was even weaker than the rest of the book. Again, Geisler does not offer any Scriptural exegesis to refute White and bolster his own view, and I found his critique of White to be decidedly hypocritical. To accuse White of name calling and ad hominem argumentation when Geisler called mainstream Calvinism 'extreme' and 'morally repugnant' among other things in CBF was highly hypocritical. I found each of Geisler's critiques of White to actually be very applicable to his own book. And again, no Scriptural exegesis is offered to either refute White, or support the tenets of CBF. In the end, I felt that Geisler unnecessarily asks readers to adopt an either/or mentality that I think is absolutely wrong, and one that I'm sure even he would disagree with. Given the significant lack of substantive exegesis of Scripture in CBF, I think it's hard for the reader to conclude from this work that Geisler's position has been adequately supported Scripturally. Again, there's a monumental difference between quoting Scripture and exegetically interpreting Scripture. Therefore, I think Geisler ends up creating a false choice where the reader must either decide that Geisler's view is correct without having much Biblical argumentation to support it, or they must conclude that Geisler is out to lunch on this issue because he is substituting human philosophy in place of Scriptural exegesis. I don't think there has to be a divorce of these things. I think human philosophy can be a very good thing - when it is anchored in Scripture. I was hoping that Geisler would put forth a meaningful argument that effectively interacted with Scripture. He did not, in my view. And I think this is regrettable.

Great book to see the counter part of "Chosen by God" by R. C. Sproul. It is wonderful to see the Reformed and Arminian view point on salvation side to side. This book helped me to see clearly that faith is a gift from God, unless God gives it to you, you can never believe and be saved. Therefore, salvation belongs to God and Him alone. Ps. 3:8 Ephesians 2:8

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