Dear Paul,
I wish to give a response to your recent comments concerning my e-mail pertaining to Spurgeon’s comments on Romans 9 located at aom.org. I will address two biblical texts: 2 Corinthians 4:4 and Romans 9.

**2 Corinthians 4:4**
I have written on 2 Corinthians 4:4 and have argued that the “god/God of this age” is indeed Yahweh. This is based on an exegetical analysis of Isaiah 6:9-10 and its influence on significant passages in the New Testament, including 2 Corinthians 4:4. The historic and exegetical information is on-line for any and all to read. To dismiss this interpretation as “improbable” is simply an assertion. The term improbable implies a statistical analysis that gives objective basis for probable, more probable, or less probable (improbable). You give no evidence, statistics, nor do you direct me towards any such study that contains such information. So I have to ask this, On what basis is my interpretation that the “god of this age” = Yahweh improbable? I have argued that the interpretation, God = Yahweh, in the phrase “God of this age” in 2 Corinthians 4:4 is the plain interpretation of the text. The main argument against this is not primarily exegetical but rather theological or subjective or out of ignorance (some simply have not read or seen the evidence yet).

You say that “nearly anyone can recognize that the phrase ‘god of THIS world’ is a conscious distinction from the true ‘God’ of verse 2, the same God who ‘was reconciling the world to himself’ in 5:19.” Your objection is based on at least two unfounded assumptions: (1) the use of “this” in “the god of this world” implies that Yahweh is ruled out; and (2) the “world” that is reconciled (2 Cor 5:19) is the same “age” mentioned in 2 Cor 4:4. This latter view is easily refuted due to the differing Greek terms. Kosmos, it may be quickly noted, undergoes equivocation in biblical and extra-biblical literature and is not uniform in terms of its referents. But this is another matter. As to the first point, let me ask you this question: Are there any clear texts that refer to the “god of this age” as Satan? I have found none in the available Greek texts but perhaps you have access to other literature that may alter or require that I adjust my view. I would certainly be open to reconsidering any new information you may have. On the other hand, I have found places where the phrase “god of this age” or near equivalents refer unambiguously to Yahweh (Dan 5:4; Tob 14:6 MS Aleph; Sir 36:7). As a matter of exegetical and hermeneutical principle, I have allowed the clear texts to inform the unclear texts rather than allow a theological agenda or emotional prejudice to construe the text. Beyond this, I find no cases in the NT where a personal agent other than Yahweh is the referent when the phrase is articular in Greek (and singular). Again, why should I postulate Satan/devil here when the lexical evidence is against it? This is not to mention the background of Isaiah 6:9-10. For anyone interested, they may consult my The Wisdom Background and Parabolic Implications of Isaiah 6:9-10 in the Synoptics. Studies in Biblical Literature, ed. Hemchand Gossai, vol. 100. New York: Lang, 2006.

In light of your title in the blog (“Where hyper-Calvinist Takes You”), do you regard my interpretation of 2 Corinthians as hyper-Calvinism? And, can you articulate the doctrines of hyper-Calvinism? If others agree with my interpretation of 2 Corinthians 4:4, then does that make them hyper-Calvinists too? Unfortunately, this charge you make against me would implicate many church fathers (mentioned in the article) as well as commit several fallacies including the anachronistic and begging the question. My recommendation is that before introducing the pejorative name-calling, that you first know both what the name “hyper-Calvinist” implies, historically, and then subsequently designate it only to those to whom it actually defines. In short, I both know what hyper-Calvinism teaches and, as Spurgeon would say, I believe not less than they do but more.
Romans 9
In essence, I think my comments found on the Alpha & Omega Ministries blog are self-explanatory about Spurgeon’s handling of Romans 9. But I find your comments and criticisms a bit confusing. Let me list these and invite a critical analysis of the facts:

You assert, “Esau was rejected because of his sin” then infer that “Hartley wants to insist that just as there was no basis for Jacob’s election in himself, so it was the case with Esau’s rejection.” However, if Esau was rejected because of his sin, then why was not Jacob also rejected? Presumably both inherited the sin of Adam that forms the basis for universal condemnation and necessitates an election by grace (Rom 5:12). Election implies that everyone is already condemned ab initio as this text clearly teaches. So why assume that I do not recognize the sinful state and condition of Esau in the womb? However, if Esau is rejected because of his sin, it does not account for why Jacob is not also rejected because of his sin—which is incidentally the same sin. If you are insisting that election and reprobation is symmetrical or that I am teaching that it is symmetrical, in order to accuse me of hyper-Calvinism, then I would say that you have seriously misread my comments. I made perfectly clear (as the blog records) that I explicitly deny symmetrical double-predestination in favor of asymmetrical double-predestination. The point is that God (if he is to save at all) must positively elect by grace to salvation precisely because all without election are damned. And, in choosing some and not all, God necessarily makes discriminations. This one election implies two choices. But the twofold choice is different in its operations. The passive aspect requires God to pass over (doctrine of preterition) the non-elect rather than actively produce sin in them. It certainly does not imply that those who are non-elect are sinless. In fact, it assumes when God leaves them to themselves, they will never accept him. The issue is why does God choose some and reject others when they are equally condemned sinners? This issue, then, is not merely a material cause of sin, as you suppose, but a humanly unconditioned choice of God that includes not choosing. That Esau was not elected is clear. But this was not due to his sin but because of God’s free, eternal, and unconditional decision to not choose him and leave him to his state, condition, and consequence of sin. Again, if the case is made against Esau for God’s non-choice, then this same case must be made against all individuals and necessarily rule out God’s election altogether. There is no “because” in the non-elect for God’s non-choice of them for salvation that is not at the same time in those he elects to salvation. Why is Esau condemned? Esau is condemned because of his sin. Why does God not elect Esau? God’s reason for not electing Esau lies in his own purpose not to save him not because of Esau’s sin. The reasons for election and reprobation are both rooted in God. He is the potter and we are the same universally sinful clay.

You infer that my statements imply an unconditional reprobation “in the same sense as is election to salvation.” But you seem to get something right and wrong at the same time. Yes, election is unconditional. Reprobation is deserved and therefore not unconditional. But the decision to reprobate is unconditional in the sense that God could have but did not choose some for salvation. But is this the same thing as inferring that the reason why God did not choose Esau is because his reprobation is justly deserved and conditioned on his sinfulness? I think not. Based on this logic, there is no reason why Jacob’s reprobation could not be justly deserved as well. All that the text is saying is that God “hates” (does not elect) and that this is a choice of God as much as the choice to save. To say that there is no condition for man’s election is to say that there is no condition that lies in man. Certainly, there is a condition or cause in God’s good pleasure. There is also no other condition for why he does not choose others (although theoretically nothing would prevent God from choosing everyone; but he did not do this). The important point is that there is no human cause for God to either choose Jacob or not
choose Esau. To say God’s choice to “hate” is “unconditional” (although I have never said this) is not to deny a material cause but to infer a superior cause in God himself (final or otherwise) that purposes to perpetuate this “hatred.” So God’s non-choice is not based on man’s sinfulness else none would be elected at all. This, as I understand it, is a major fallacy of your thinking here. If the cause of Esau’s rejection does not account for the same rejection of Jacob, when in fact the same sinful conditions apply to both, then there must be an overarching condition lying outside of either one that accounts for God passing over Esau and not Jacob.

The comments on mercy versus hardening are hardly contrary to my view. It seems you are arguing against a strawman here. To assert man’s sinfulness ab initio is not the same thing as saying that one’s non-elect status is due to man’s inherent or imputed sin. Again, this is a major flaw in your thinking. The cause for non-election is as inscrutable as the cause for election. Both lie in God alone. I completely agree with the remaining statements in your second paragraph beginning with “The need for mercy implies that a person is already viewed as sinful.” Agreed. In fact, this paragraph teaches exactly what I have asserted, namely, “that God has chosen not to grant to that person a softening of the heart, and the gift of faith, but instead to confirm the person in their state of disbelief and judgment.” However, you err when you say, “This is exactly what happened in the case of Esau.” Esau exhibited no disbelief in the womb did he? Therefore he was not “hardened” because of unbelief. Indeed, all are hard-hearted from the womb (unless regenerated there). To not grant this soft heart is what it means by the phrase “to harden.” But hardening is not retributive or based on behavior—indeed, it is also unconditional and rooted in God’s choice. This means there is no human reason (other than material) to account for God not choosing (hating) or hardening (non-transformative manner of course) man. But this material cause cannot be the sufficient cause else election would be precluded from occurring at all. If there is a condition for God not choosing man, then that condition must be applied universally because the cause applies to all men. Since it is not applied to all, the cause must lie elsewhere and outside of man. So it is not enough to say that Esau was not elected due to his sin. It is an oversimplification of the issue.

Your third paragraph seems to refute your own statements. Your post begins by saying, “Esau was rejected because of his sin,” and here you say, “What this verse [Rom 9:11] is saying is not that God’s reprobation of Esau has nothing to do with his sinfulness, but rather that God’s election of Jacob over Esau was announced prior to their birth, so that others would know that it was God’s sovereignty, and not Jacob’s superiority, which led him to choose Jacob over Esau.” But I fail to see how this follows. If Jacob and Esau are guilty of the same sin in the womb, why is Esau rejected because of his sin and not Jacob? You might say, “Because God chose him.” I would agree. But why did he not choose Esau? The answer cannot be, “Because of his sin.” Why? Esau cannot be unelected due to his sin because both Jacob and Esau were guilty of the same original sin. In fact, the passage goes out of his way to deny the solution you give. The text reads, “even before they were born or had done anything good or bad (so that God’s purpose in election would stand, not by works but by his calling)....” (NET Bible). It is absurd to say that the election of Jacob is unconditional and then to say that the non-election of Esau is conditioned on his sin when the text asserts explicitly to the contrary. It was “before they were born or had done anything good or bad.” Good in the sense meriting election and bad in respect to reprobation. This does not mean that Esau did not deserve damnation but that the cause of his damnation is not the cause of his non-election else no one would be elected to salvation. I find it impossible not to infer from your argument that Jacob is in some way “superior” to Esau.
It also seems that you confuse the asymmetry of the “hate” for Esau and the “choice of Jacob over Esau” in terms of conditions. You suppose one is unconditional (election) and the other conditional (reprobation; but see above). It is not just a matter of “that God hated Esau irrespective of his sin” but why God perpetuated this hatred for Esau and not Jacob. As I stated above, material causality does not answer the question as to how God can choose at all. Again, how can God hate Esau, with respect to his sin, when Jacob was guilty of the same sin? How can God love Jacob, with respect to his sin, when he hates Esau with respect to the same sin? The answer to why God “hates” Esau cannot be solely based on Esau’s sin therefore. It must necessarily be something else. Why does God not hate Jacob? Or, why does God choose not to love Esau? Sin cannot answer either question with any consistency and this demonstrates the fallacy of assuming a human cause lying behind non-election or reprobation. You also add, “lest anyone get the idea that it was because of Jacob’s subsequent moral superiority that this determination was made.” I agree. But as you recall, this is opposite of what Spurgeon was arguing. He gave reasons why God hated Esau based on the historical record of his life in Genesis, precisely what Paul denies. So in disagreeing with Spurgeon on the same point as I did in my e-mail, does this mean you are agreeing with my assessment of Spurgeon? And more importantly, does your disagreement with Spurgeon and agreement with me make you a hyper-Calvinist?

There is little basis for the following statement: “Not at all, but this does not change the fact that Esau’s sinful condition WAS the basis of his reprobation.” This may be true on a material cause (basis) but false on a final (cause) basis. If Esau’s sin was the sufficient cause of his reprobation, then how can anyone be elected at all? This same basis existed in Jacob as well. Esau was “hated” precisely because he was not “elected.” His damnation is deserved because of inherited sin and sinfulness before doing “anything good or bad.” Man is not reprobated because of his sinful condition. This functions only as a necessary condition. It is certainly not sufficient. God must enforce this by refusing to elect that person to salvation. And, in order to save anyone, he must choose those who are destined to reprobation due to their sin. Man deserves hell due to his sin; God reprobates men to hell because he does not elect them to salvation. God’s final cause in double-predestination is his glory. This is what Paul affirms when he says he raised Pharaoh up in order to demonstrate his power and that his [God’s] name might be proclaimed in the world (Rom 9:17). God elects, loves, and shows mercy to some for his own glory but God hates, hardens, and refuses to show mercy to others for his own glory. The reasons for both destinies of sinful man are found only in God not man.

Your final statements seem to reiterate my own view. In choosing not to show mercy to Esau, Paul shows that the very basis of his non-choice is inscrutable. Man does not deserve mercy because he is sinful. God chooses, nevertheless, to show mercy to some. Therefore, sinfulness (actual or foreseen) is not the condition for reprobation. Why one gets mercy and the other reprobation lies in the inscrutable will of God alone.

All the best,
Donald E. Hartley, Ph.D.