

By Grace Alone

A DOCTRINAL STUDY BY JIM McCLARTY

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SCRIPTURAL COMMENTARY

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Commentary on the Hebrews Epistle

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jim McClarty is senior pastor of Grace Christian Assembly in Smyrna, Tennessee. He has been teaching the Word of God for fifteen years. He devotes his time to reading and learning so he can tell others the Good News of Christ.

You can read more of Jim's writing online at the Grace Christian Assembly website: <http://www.salvationbygrace.org>.

This book is dedicated, with no small amount of affection, to the members of Grace Christian Assembly.

Your patience, support, dedication and faithfulness are a testimony and witness to the grace of God.

A friend once told me,
“The proof that God has called a man to preach is that He has also called people to hear him.”

Or, as the Apostle Paul put it,
“Ye are our epistle written in our hearts...”

Thank you for putting up with my rants, encouraging my teaching, and being the dearest friends

I have on this earth.

I am privileged to be your pastor.

It is no novelty, then, that I am preaching. No new doctrine. I love to proclaim these strong old doctrines, that are called by the nickname Calvinism, but which are surely and verily the revealed truth of God as it is in Christ Jesus. By this truth I make a pilgrimage into the past, and as I go, I see father after father, confessor after confessor, martyr after martyr, standing up to shake hands with me. Were I a Pelagian, or a believer in the doctrine of free-will, I should have to walk for centuries all alone. Here and there a heretic of no very honorable character might rise up and call me brother. But, taking these things to be the standard of my faith, I see the land of the ancients peopled with my brethren; I behold multitudes who confess the same as I do, and acknowledge that this is the religion of God's own church.

Charles H. Spurgeon, Metropolitan Tabernacle (1834-1892)

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OPENING COMMENTS
BY GRACE ALONE

As a Bible teacher, I am often asked, “What does your church believe?” It hardly suffices to answer, “We believe the Bible.” Most Christian churches would say the same. So, the purpose of this book is to clarify what we at Grace Christian Assembly believe and why we believe it.

I am not the first writer to attempt presenting these doctrines in the contemporary forum. But these are weighty subjects. So, far too often, this material is presented in a manner so full of theological jargon that the average layman is left as perplexed at the last page as he was at the first. Therefore, it is my hope and intention that this presentation is clear and concise and fully accessible to every reader “with eyes to see.”

The first rule of Bible interpretation has always been: The Bible says what it means and means what it says. The second rule is like the first: Scripture interprets Scripture.

It is not at all uncommon for preachers to “hunt and peck” through Scripture, searching for out-of-context verses that appear to support the particular theology, tradition, or “philosophical presupposition” the man or his denomination holds dear. But, the Apostle Paul warned –

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ (Colossians 2:8).

For this reason, we have supported each of these doctrines with a variety of Scripture references. But, we are quick to point out that this is far from an exhaustive study. When it comes to considering the work and nature of Christ, even the apostle John had to conclude “...if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written” (John 21:25).

The sovereignty and grace of God are interwoven through every verse of Scripture. As we come to know the Lord of Scripture, we will more readily recognize his Lordship in Scripture. This book is merely the tip of the iceberg, meant to stimulate thought and discussion, and to aid us on our search for the truth of salvation in Christ our Lord.

May God bless you as you read.

INTRODUCTION
THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE

This book is about Biblical *soteriology*. That's just theological jargon for the study of the divine accomplishment of salvation. The world's great religions all agree that men (used in this book to denote humanity of both sexes) are spiritual beings wrapped in human flesh. Most of them agree that when the flesh dies, the spirit lives on in one form or another. Biblical Christianity teaches that the author, or creator, of that spiritual life is God. However, the Bible also states plainly that not every person who dies will stand forgiven and accepted in the presence of the Holy God. How it happens that some are saved and some are eternally lost is the focus of our study.

Do not be put off by this word "doctrine." It simply refers to anything taught as a principle or creed of religion. That's all. What we are studying here are the principles of Biblical Christianity, systematized into a cohesive theology, so that we can better understand the underlying tenets, principles and concepts of the Bible. The Apostle Paul was a great advocate of proper doctrine.

Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine (1 Timothy 4:13).

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

...be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;
(Ephesians 4:14)

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

It is vital that the Church be well furnished in the doctrines of Christ, because they are the very foundation stones on which genuine Christianity is built.

For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; But, a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers (Titus 1:7-9).

But, speak thou the things which become sound doctrine (Titus 2:1).

≈ THE HISTORY

Calvinism, as it is commonly called, has a rich European history, but it finds its most striking influence during the foundation of these United States. Owing to Martin Luther's commitment to reform, the church that bears his name was founded on the teaching of God's election and determinate predestination. John Knox, the founder of the Presbyterian Church, held these doctrines. Early American history reveals that the vast majority of the Pilgrims who landed at Plymouth Rock were Calvinistic Presbyterians. The Congregationalist Churches of early America were once bound by these doctrines. And the original Baptists were avid predestinarians, which is why their modern counterparts advertise themselves as "Free-Will Baptists" to distinguish themselves from their ancestors.

This English Calvinist strain was strengthened by the Dutch Calvinists of New York and New Jersey, the German Reformed of Pennsylvania and Maryland, and the Scots-Irish Presbyterians who settled in the mid-Atlantic and southern colonies. While not all settlers in the New World were Protestant and not all Protestants were Calvinist, nevertheless there was from the very beginning a strongly Calvinist influence on American thought and institutions. Calvinists founded universities, pioneered the New England town meeting, insisted on the separation of powers in the federal government, played a prominent role in the movement for the abolition of slavery, and even promoted such characteristic institutions of frontier revivalism as ‘the anxious bench’ and the ‘camp-meeting’ ... In short, although Calvinism is not the only ingredient in American intellectual and religious history, it is such an important ingredient that no one can claim to understand American history and culture without some appreciation of its Calvinist heritage.¹

These are not new truths or recent innovations we are considering. These are the old truths; the foundations of the faith. So, it is necessary that we get a quick overview of Reformation history in order to understand where we came from and how we got here. However, inasmuch as this is not a book dedicated to the history of the Church, and considering the enormous, sweeping scope of the Reformation, there are a great many details and important personages we could recount who will be passed over. In this book we are only going to become familiar with those particular names and historic events that directly relate to the doctrinal presentation that follows.

For the first 300 years of the Church’s existence, theologians and writers concentrated primarily on the nature of Christ, His deity and His humanity. Consequently, we do not find much in the way of what we would call *Grace Doctrine* up until the 5th century – which is not to say that the doctrines were not clearly spelled out within the Biblical text. But, we need to remember that the Bible was not canonized, in the version we now have, for several hundred years.

From the beginning, Christianity was embroiled in a struggle between the Jewish converts, who were steeped in the traditions of their history, and the Gentile converts who followed the Pauline theology of justification by grace without the works of the Law.

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified (Galatians 2:16).

Naturally, factions arose in the Church, defending either side of the Law/Grace controversy. While one side argued in favor of Paul's stance, Jewish converts were often unable to release themselves from the traditions of their forefathers and religious leaders, promoting the notion of salvation by works and individual righteousness earned by keeping the Sinaitic law.

It was Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) who reintroduced into the collective public knowledge the fact that the Bible emphasizes man's fallen state, election without conditions and salvation by grace.

Augustine began systematizing Biblical theology to refute the teaching of Pelagius (360?-420?), who left Rome permanently in 411 AD and disappears from the historic record around 418. Pelagius taught that, contrary to the Biblical record, the fall of Adam was an individual failure that had no bearing on mankind as a whole. He taught that Christ's death was merely an example of martyrdom and that a man in his natural state had the ability to work out his own personal salvation by force of will and determination.

So, Augustine developed systematic teaching of the very opposite. He taught:

- That the entire human race fell in Adam.
- That all men, by nature, are depraved and spiritually dead.
- That the individual will is free to sin, but not free to do good toward God.
- That Christ suffered as a substitute for a particular group of people.
- That God elects whom He will irrespective of merit.
- That saving grace is efficaciously applied to those elect individuals by the Holy Spirit.

Augustine was the first true interpreter of the Apostle Paul and was successful in securing the acceptance of this teaching by the early Church. Soon after that, however, the Roman Catholic Church increased in power and prominence. Over time, Rome promoted a reliance on superstition and increased Scriptural ignorance. The Popes gained tremendous political and ecclesiastical power and eventually most of Europe fell under Rome's dominion. The morals of the church leadership grew increasingly wicked, as the priesthood became more corrupt, culminating in the selling of indulgences: payments made to reduce temporal punishment for sin, either in this life or on behalf of souls in Purgatory. The Church at Rome basked in practices derived from the mysterious religions of ancient Babylon, preferring ecclesiastical tradition over Christian doctrine. The Scriptures were effectively hidden from common people, being considered too "holy" and difficult for any but the high initiates of the clergy to read.

To understand our Renaissance roots, we must recall that in the fifth century the barbarians of northern Europe shattered the Roman Empire – its political institutions, its learning, and its arts. This wholesale destruction of Roman culture plunged Europe into a thousand year period sometimes known as "The Dark Ages." That period was "dark" because the light of learning, for the most part, had gone out. Ignorance prevailed on almost every hand.

Spiritual life for most Europeans in that period was dominated by two themes: superstition and dependence. With learning almost eclipsed, and with reliable instruction in Scripture and theology almost non-existent, the common people indulged their imaginations in countless superstitions. The average person envisioned the world as filled with angels, devils, and other supernatural beings which controlled life and determined destiny. The Roman Catholic Church came to dominate both European politics and culture, and virtually every person depended on the church for eternal salvation. On the one hand, the church controlled and administered the seven sacraments which, it maintained, were the only means by which the saving grace of God might be dispensed. On the other hand, the church held the

immense power of excommunication, which barred heretics and sinners from the saving grace of the sacraments, and the power of the interdict by which the Pope might bar from the sacraments an entire nation or people. These powerful tools rendered an entire European populace dependent on a wrathful God who expressed the divine will solely through the Roman church.²

It was out of this morass that Martin Luther (1483-1546), an Augustinian monk, led the German reformation of the Church. Luther was a full-fledged predestinarian. In his writing *Bondage of the Will*, he states the doctrine of predestination clearly.

John Calvin (1509-1564) built on the foundations laid by Martin Luther. The followers of men such as John Calvin, Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531), and John Knox (1513-1572) became known as “the Reformers.” Their goal was the denial of Rome’s dogma and tradition while defining and restoring Biblical doctrine. The Church of Rome, determined to stop this outgrowth of anti-Catholic theology, created “articles of faith” granting themselves the right to hang or burn anyone with whom they disagreed. So, the church of the Reformation, the Protestants, who protested against the heresy of the Catholic Church, often risked life and limb in order to profess what they believed.

≈ “ARMINIANISM”

Jacob (or John) Arminius (1560-1609) was a student of John Calvin’s successor, Theodore Beza, who taught at the University of Geneva in Switzerland. In 1588, Arminius read the writings of the Pelagian theologian Dorch Coornhert (1522-1591) and he found the argument to be stronger than his own conviction. He became a convert to the doctrines of *universal grace* and *freedom of the will*.

Arminius applied to the government of Holland to organize a synod, or meeting of churches, to establish the official position of the Church in respect to doctrine. He had two primary disagreements with the widespread Augustinian/Calvinistic view:

1. Was election by God to salvation conditional or unconditional? In other words, did God elect men for no good reason other than His sovereign pleasure? Or was there some good or attractive

feature—like a confession or faithfulness—that obligated God to choose a person?

2. Was the grace of God resistible or irresistible? In other words, if God chose a person with the intent to save them, could that person resist God if they wanted to? Or, were they simply bound for Heaven regardless of their individual will and choice?

On November 13, 1618, a national Synod was held at Dort, Holland. In attendance were representatives from nearly all the Reformed Churches of Europe, including the Church of England. The Synod lasted until May 9, 1619. The Arminian contingency argued their claim for the following five points as the basis of Biblical doctrine:

1. God elects or reprobates men on the basis of foreseen faith or unbelief. In other words, God in His infinite wisdom looks down the long telescope of human history and sees in advance who will believe and who will not. God “chooses” or rejects them based on that knowledge.
2. Christ died for all men and for every man, although only believers are saved.
3. Man is so depraved that divine grace is necessary - leading to faith.
4. However, an individual may resist this grace.
5. Truly regenerate believers may lose their faith and thus lose their salvation.

The synod of Dort compared the Arminian doctrines but failed to reconcile them with the clear word of Scripture. As a result, they were wholly rejected. Because they advance the superiority of man’s will over God’s rulership, these theories appeal to man’s desire to rule his own destiny, and continue to be taught in churches all over the world. Over the years, Arminian teaching has become characterized by increasing differences from the orthodox and historical Pauline faith. For instance, here are some of the theological tenets currently held by churches that espouse Arminian doctrine:

- Sin consists in acts of the will, as opposed to being an inherent nature.
- Pollution is inherited from Adam’s fall, but his guilt is not imputed to any of his descendants.
- Man’s depravity as a result of the fall should not be considered as total.

- Man has not lost the faculty of self-determination nor the ability to incline his will toward good ends.
- The atonement of Christ is intended equally for all men and for every man, and it merely makes salvation possible. Salvation becomes effectual only when the repentant believer accepts it.
- Repentance and faith precede regeneration.
- The human will is one of the causes of regeneration.
- Faith is a good work of man and a ground of acceptance with God.
- Christ's own personal righteousness is not imputed to the believer.
- It is possible that the believer is able to attain in this life a state of such conformity to the divine will that he may be called "perfect".
- Love is the supreme attribute of God, the very essence of His being.
- Man is never so completely corrupted by sin that he cannot savingly believe the Gospel when it is presented to him, nor is he ever so completely controlled by God that he cannot reject it.
- It rests with the believer to keep himself in a state of grace by sustaining his own faith. Those who fail in this regard are lost as a result of their own lack of will power.

∞ THE "DOCTRINES OF GRACE"

As a result of the determination that the five points of Arminianism were wholly unscriptural, the Synod developed a system of theology that has ever since been known as "The Five Points of Calvinism." This system is built upon the foundation of the Sovereignty of God in all things. These are the fundamental doctrines of salvation taught by Paul and handed down to us in Scripture.

Now this is probably a good juncture at which to define a few particulars. While the doctrines presented in this study go by the nickname of "Calvinism," I am not strictly a Calvinist, *per se*. I do not worship John Calvin. In fact, Calvin believed many things I do not. For instance, he believed that we could usher in the millennial kingdom by living righteously enough. I disagree. I contend that the Bible teaches that God has "set times" and the course of human history will come to its conclusion at precisely the moment that God ordained from the foundations of the world.

John Calvin was a Sabbath-keeper. I am not. Paul clearly teaches that resting in the finished work of Christ is the fulfillment of the type and shadow of Old Testament Sabbaths (Colossians 2:16-17).

John Calvin was a “sacrilist” who believed in using the power of the State to quell the Anabaptist rebellion against the increasingly Constantinian/Catholic tendencies in the Reformed Church, even to the burning of “heretics.”

Even the most adamant defenders of Reformation theology agree that Calvinism has changed and grown through the years, leaving some of its early errors behind. That is why the Reformers’ credo of “always reforming” continues to ring true in our ears.

Men are fallible; even the wisest of men. That is why we follow Christ - not men. Nevertheless, God has granted certain men wonderful insight into His Word and the wisdom to systematize a theology that we can clearly comprehend and which will help us understand Scripture as we read it. So, while John Calvin and I part company occasionally, the system of doctrine that grew out of the Synod of Dort remains Biblically sound and valid.

Over time, these doctrines have come to be known as the *Doctrines of Grace*, differentiating them from John Calvin, the person, and putting the emphasis where it belongs - on God, Himself. Some people like to remember the five points by using an acrostic, utilizing the word TULIP:

- T Total Depravity or Total Inability
- U Unconditional Election
- L Limited Atonement
- I Irresistible Grace
- P Perseverance of the Saints

These doctrines have also been represented in an acrostic using the word GRACE:

- G Gracious Election
- R Ruined Sinners
- A Accomplished Redemption
- C Compelling Love
- E Everlasting Life

Here is one more presentation of the five doctrines, emphasizing the stages of Grace and Salvation:

The *Necessity* of Grace.....Total Depravity..... Salvation Required
The *Fountain* of Grace.....Unconditional Election..... Salvation Planned
The *Provision* of Grace.....Particular Redemption..... Salvation Purchased
The *Revelation* of GraceEffectual Calling.....Salvation Applied
The *Victory* of Grace.....Perseverance of the Saints..... Salvation Perfected

∞ THE DIFFERENCES

Now, just about every church that hangs the name “Christian” above their door will agree that human beings are sinners. The debate centers on the degree to which men are sinners and the extent of the damage done as a result of the fall. So question one is:

Are men simply less good than they once were?

or

Are humans utterly ruined because of Adam’s rebellion?

Then, the Bible speaks constantly of God choosing certain people for certain tasks and particular destinies. So, question two is:

Does God choose on the basis of earned merit?

or

Does God choose according to His own private purposes and good pleasure?

Then, all Christian churches agree that Jesus died on a cross though He was personally innocent. So, He died as a substitute for someone other than Himself. The debate arises over who the recipients of this atonement are. So, question three is:

Did Christ die for each and every human individual who ever lived?

or

Did Christ die specifically for those elect individuals whom God sovereignly chose to give eternal life?

The Bible is also replete with references to man’s need of the Holy Spirit in order to be saved. So, question four is:

Can a person resist the calling of the Holy Spirit?

or

Once God chooses a ruined sinner and Christ dies for Him, must that man or woman give in to the call of God and be saved?

Lastly, inasmuch as a person may be saved at any point in their lifetime on Earth and yet remain here for many more years, question five is:

Can a person be chosen, paid for, and accept the call of God and then lose their salvation, either by active choice or ignorant neglect?

or

Does the sureness of the choosing, the completeness of the payment, the certainty of the call, and the application of the Spirit guarantee that the power of God will carry that saved person all the way to their predetermined destiny in Heaven?

These are the questions we seek to answer in this study of the Doctrines of Grace. And once you have come to understand them, you will find that they permeate Scripture. They are not hidden in isolated verses that need to be pulled out-of-context and “privately interpreted” in order to substantiate them. They are the very “heart” of Scripture.

¹ Steinmetz, David. *Calvin In Context*. (New York, N.Y. Oxford University Press. 1995). Pg. 5

² Allen, C. Leonard and Hughes, Richard T. *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of Churches of Christ*. (Abilene, TX. ACU Press. 1988) Pgs. 11-12

CHAPTER ONE
TOTAL DEPRAVITY

As with any subject we must begin at the beginning and start at the start. *Total Depravity* means that every part of a natural man, the whole and total being, is corrupt and incapable of doing any good thing that would please God. Simply stated, this first doctrine says, “Man is a sinner.”

Some theologians prefer the phrase *Total Inability* to emphasize the point that men are totally unable to help themselves, although they are not as bad as they could be, which *Total Depravity* seems to imply. But, it is simply a matter of preference. The Biblical fact of the matter is that humans are in a desperate condition.

It all started in the Garden of Eden. After Adam and Eve’s disobedience, the nature of men changed from being “in God’s own image and likeness” to the image of their father Adam; corrupted and sinful. That change of character and nature was passed down to every one of Adam’s descendants.

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all have sinned; (Romans 5:12)

This new state was not simply one of occasional misdeeds, but an utter overhaul of the intrinsic make-up of humanity.

And, God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually (Genesis 6:5).

Notice that even among the earliest of Adam’s descendants, their wickedness was great and every thought of their imagination and every desire of their heart was only wickedness - nothing else. And it was wick-

edness continually! No short periods of some good crept in. That is the way God views men and women after their own nature.

Now, according to Paul, once the sin nature entered mankind, each and every human individual was born into this state. We are fallen creatures. Still, people resist this notion. So questions arise. At what point does a person become this wicked sinner? Is he born this way or does he learn it? Are babies born innocent and do they reach an “age of accountability” when they must take responsibility for their actions?

Much to most people’s surprise, the Bible claims that humans are born with these evil tendencies. They are not culturally inherited or learned. The evil imagination is intact and operative even before birth.

And the LORD smelled a sweet savour; and the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake; for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done (Genesis 8:21).

Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me (Psalm 51:5).

The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies (Psalm 58:3).

This estrangement from God begins at conception. The sins of the fathers are passed down to the sons and daughters by the blood of the parents. Children are guilty and come forth from the womb speaking lies, proving their sinfulness.

This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead (Ecclesiastes 9:3).

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9)

Sin hits at the very core of our personalities and character. Sin does not begin with an external action, such as drunkenness, sexual misconduct, murder, or the like. Sin begins in our hearts and those deeds are simply the manifestation of the rebellion that already thrives within.

This ruinous nature does not simply render a man unwilling to do good, it renders him utterly incapable of doing anything that would be considered pleasing in God's sight. That is the extent of his depravity. He not only enjoys his rebellion, he is unable to do anything on his own behalf in order to please or attract God.

Now, there is an important theological reality inherent in this fact. If this is true that men and women possess a fundamental incapability to do good or to please God, then despite modern traditions to the contrary, it is pointless, futile, illogical and obviously unscriptural to tell such totally depraved people to "believe and have faith," or to "make a decision for Christ." Fleshly creatures have no ability to muster up faith or think such good things. Their hearts and thoughts are "only evil continually." So, how can they suddenly decide to choose eternal life and have faith in God?

Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?
Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil
(Jeremiah 13:23).

The obvious answer is - "No, the Ethiopian and the leopard are powerless to change themselves. They are products of their nature. They were born that way and they are without choice." So likewise, the person born into a state of wickedness and ruin is powerless to act against his or her own nature and do something—anything—that is good.

The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good; no, not one (Psalm 14:2).

As it is written, there is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.

They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one (Romans 3:10-12).

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way... (Isaiah 53:6)

There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death (Proverbs 14:12).

Clearly, God views people—all people—as evil, corrupt beings. And we read in both the Old and New Testament that not one single person ever chose to seek God or to follow after Him. There are none that understand spiritual things and there are none that are spiritually profitable.

“No, not one.”

≈ TOTAL INABILITY

Jesus spoke of men not being *able* to follow Him. He declared that they would not only follow their natural inclination to rebel and misunderstand, but they were incapable of doing any differently! He spoke of them having eyes, but they could not see. He spoke of them having ears but they could not hear. He said that the reason they would not come to Him was because they could not come to Him!

“Why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word” (John 8:43).

“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:44).

“A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit” (Matthew 7:18).

“Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come” (John 7:34).

Jesus answered and said unto him, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

Notice how emphatic Jesus’ statements are. He did not say that men would be responsible to view Him and then decide for themselves. He did not open up the possibility of choice or decision. He stated unequivocally that men would react in accordance with their complete inability.

Then Paul, the great interpreter of the Old Testament, carried this theme over into his epistles:

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be (Romans 8:7).

So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God (Romans 8:8).

This is the crux of the whole discussion. The Bible tells us that humans were not simply bruised by the fall of Adam; they did not receive a mere flesh wound that will heal. God told Adam that the day he ate of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil that he would die!

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (Genesis 2:16-17).

Yet, Adam lived for hundreds of years after the fatal choice. Was God mistaken? No. Adam died spiritually at that very instant. He was not just bruised spiritually; he was dead in sin. Then he began dying physically as a result of his spiritual decay.

Let’s look closer at the events that led to our current state of total depravity. Adam and his wife were the sole occupants of the glorious garden God had given them to oversee. Originally, they had only one prohibition against their freedom of choice. Prior to the fall, Adam and Eve had the “free-est” wills of anyone who ever lived. Their options were

completely unencumbered, with the exception of that one, single regulation. But, the serpent, Satan, entered the garden and approached the woman with the intent of causing her to act against God's rule.

Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil (Genesis 3:1-5).

Despite Eve's awareness of the command of God not to touch or eat from the tree, she was persuaded that partaking of its fruit would make her "like God" in that she would decide for herself what was good and what was bad. In short, Eve would make up her own mind and form her own rules as regarding her life and her eternal state. Eve then would be the first person to truly exercise "free will" despite the clear dictates of God's word.

This concept of choice and "free will" stands as a staple of most Arminian teaching. The underlying assumption of such teaching is that if men simply knew the difference between right and wrong they would most naturally choose the good and avoid the bad. But, what was the outcome of Eve's decision? Did she, in fact, become like God? Did her newfound wisdom improve her spiritual standing?

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid

themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself (Genesis 3:6-10).

The disobedience of Adam and Eve resulted in shame and fear. The ability to think for themselves and act according to their own determination drove them further from God, not closer to Him.

Now, according to the Apostle John, sin is inspired by these three worldly factors: The lust of the flesh; the lust of the eyes; and the pride of life.

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world (1 John 2:16).

Eve saw that the fruit was good for food (the lust of the flesh), it was pleasant to the eyes (the lust of the eyes) and it was desired to make one wise (the pride of life). But, the outcome was not that she and Adam became God-like in any sense. Just the opposite took place. The first thing they realized was that they were naked and they suffered shame. They were exposed as sinners, rebels against the command of God, and they tried to cover their guilt and hide.

And, adding to their humiliation, rather than becoming on an equal par with God, sharing in His power, they fell from His good graces and were punished by the One who retained all power. They were defenseless against His judgment. God cursed each of them, the serpent included, and they were helplessly incapable to stand against the decree of the Most High God. Rather than becoming Godlike in their self-will, they became cursed sinners, slaves to their shame, and in bondage to their rebellion. They were cast out of Eden and mankind was cut off from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life.

Adam is spoken of in theological circles as being the “federal head” of all mankind. What that means is that God holds every man and woman guilty of Adam’s offense. We are all born into Adam’s bloodline and we are all his descendants. Hence, we are all the fallen children of

the first rebels. Their fall, and the resulting change of spiritual nature, is imputed to each of us. We are not born spiritually *neutral*. We are born *rebels* against the command of God, and like our parents, we are helpless to resist the judgment of the Almighty.

∞ OUR NATURE

To drive home the point of our helpless estate, Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus and emphatically declared our fallen nature:

And, you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others (Ephesians 2:1-3).

Despite the fact that in these verses Paul was exhorting believers who have “passed from death unto life,” notice his description of men in their natural state:

- Dead in trespasses and sins
- Walking in accordance with Satan, the prince of the power of the air, being children of disobedience.
- And, we all strive to fulfill the lusts and desires of our flesh and our carnal minds because we are by nature the children of wrath.

Men are born *dead* in trespasses and sins. Not wounded. Not staggering. Not doing the best they can – just stone, cold dead. A dead man is totally incapable of helping himself. Consider Lazarus. Could he help himself get up from the grave? Or, could Ezekiel’s valley of dry bones help themselves to recover? Absolutely not! They were utterly *incapable*.

Not only are we born into this depraved state and incapable of changing our lot, we are not able to resist sin! Scripture calls us “bond slaves” to sin. We are sold out to it! It owns us. And as slaves, we will certainly do our master’s bidding.

Jesus answered them, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin” (John 8:34).

But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O, wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? (Romans 7:23)

Paul declared that the individual members of his body were under bondage to a natural law from which he was unable to deliver himself. Even though Paul knew the law of God in his mind, the law of sin that pervaded his being brought him into captivity. He called his body a body of death because it was corrupted by sin, and he cried out over his inability to deliver himself from that impending death.

A man is no more capable of using his will to resist the law of sin in his body than he is of utilizing his will to release himself from the law of gravity.

∞ “BUT WE DO NICE THINGS!”

The doctrine of Total Depravity does not rule out the possibility that people may do relatively good things. We are not what theologians call “absolutely depraved.” We are capable of doing good works, as compared to other more evil works. It all depends on what we use as our measuring rod. Compared to the works of Hitler, the works of Mother Teresa look very good. However, compared to the works of Christ, in His perfect obedience and willing sacrifice, we all fall woefully short. And beyond that, when we are compared to the perfect holiness and righteousness of God—well, let’s let Job respond:

How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman? Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not; yea, the stars are not pure in His sight. How much less man, that is a worm? And the son of man, which is a worm? (Job 25:4-6)

It is true that mankind does not rave about in unrestrained madness. God rules over every facet of His kingdom and restrains men from

being wholly and completely taken over by their evil natures and running hog-wild.

Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain (Psalm 76:10).

In other words, men are not as bad as we could be. We are capable of doing charitable or kind acts. We may recognize that murder is wrong and therefore avoid killing. We may be loyal husbands and wives, generous providers, civil servants or socially conscious citizens. However, these acts do not change our basic nature and they remain insufficient to please the high standard of a righteous, holy God. It takes more than fleshly works to please Him. It takes spiritual attributes, like faith.

Without faith it is impossible to please Him. For he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him (Hebrews 11:6).

The natural man has no faith in God whatsoever. And his actions, however well intended, are not sufficient to make up for that lack of faith. Consequently, every fleshly activity of the natural man – regardless of its relative merit – is viewed by God as sin.

An high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked is sin (Proverbs 21:4).

This proverb teaches us that arrogance and pride are sinful. That's easy to grasp. But, it also declares that just plowing a field, doing everyday chores and going about our natural lives, is sin in God's eyes. Therefore, the relative merit or harm of individual actions does not determine sinfulness. Sin is not just doing bad things. Sin is being how we are - sinful by nature.

We are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners.

One of the Greek words translated *sin* in the Bible is *hamartia*. It means *falling short of God's perfection; missing the mark*. Simply being less than God, in terms of perfection, holiness and righteousness is defined as sin. But, we are far beyond merely "missing the mark."

... verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity
(Psalm 39:5).

At our best, we all come far short of perfection.

Destruction and misery are in their ways: and the way of peace
have they not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes
(Romans 3: 16-18).

That's the natural state of man. There is no fear of God before their eyes. And, according to Psalm 111:10, "the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom." And, to make matters worse, even our best works and righteous behavior amounts to nothing:

But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses
are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities,
like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none that calleth
upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for
thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of
our iniquities (Isaiah 64:6-7).

≈ THE ENDURANCE OF SIN

An inherent characteristic of sin is that once it began, it became a force so powerful that only God Himself could control or eradicate it. Once Satan rebelled in Heaven and was cast down (Luke 10:18), he was powerless to turn from his wicked ways. Ultimately, God will bind him and cast him into the Lake of Fire in order to stop his perniciousness (Matthew 25:41, Revelation 19:20). Likewise, children of devil will do exactly as their father does, refusing to turn from their rebellion and succumbing to condemnation.

"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. And, because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not" (John 8:44-45).

Even at the end of time, when God executes judgment on the world, the inhabitants of Earth will not cry out for mercy or “choose” to have faith and be saved. In the midst of terror and woe, men will exhibit their absolute inability to turn from their wickedness and will instead seek refuge from the face of God.

And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?”
(Revelation 6:15-17)

Now certainly, if all a man needs in order to “choose to believe” or to “repent and have faith” is an adequate inducement, these men have plenty! But, they are completely unable to repent, so they run from the Lamb.

For any man to be relieved from the pervasive pressure and guilt of sinfulness, God must perform a miraculous act of change. The fallen nature must be converted to an eternal, spiritual nature. Left to themselves, an individual is incapable of changing or even recognizing the desperation of his condition.

So, God must make the first move. Man is incapable. Thus, conversion and the activity of salvation rest in the hands of God.

∞ CONCLUSION

To review, the Doctrine of Total Depravity tells us:

- When Adam fell, all of mankind was present in our representative father and we all share in the curse that accompanied his rebellion. The wages of sin is “death” (Romans 6:23). We know that men continue to be accounted sinful because men continue dying.
- Even though there are some relatively “good” acts which men are capable of performing, such activities are nothing more than filthy rags. They count for nothing in the councils of Heaven.

- Man is totally incapable of helping himself. He is dead in trespasses and sins. He is a slave to sin. He has a deceitful, wicked heart and he will act on the lusts and desires of his heart every time. As such, he cannot “choose,” “decide,” be intellectually stimulated, persuaded, or coerced into activating his own faith.

We cannot understand the Bible, or “the love that drew salvation’s plan” until we understand this point. And, we cannot understand anything about the other Doctrines of Grace until we understand this one. We will never truly appreciate the humility of Christ and how far down he reached to save us until we “look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged” (Isaiah 51:1).

When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, “They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Mark 2:17).

It all stands or falls right here. Healthy men do not need a physician (Luke 5:31). Quickened men do not need a resurrection. Alive men do not need to be “born again.” Jesus came to seek and to save them that were lost. He came to heal the sick and raise the dead - not reward the good and encourage the well able.

And, if you recognize yourself in this description of depraved humans, then there is a good likelihood Christ came to save you. It is only by the grace of God that a man will realize and admit that he is utterly helpless and desperately in need of a Savior.

“Okay, Jim,” you reply, “I’m pretty much convinced. But, given that humans are utterly evil and depraved in God’s Holy sight and we are completely unable to help ourselves, how can any person be saved? We know the Bible says some will be.”

Yes, exactly! That’s why these are called Doctrines of *Grace*. If there is nothing in men that would attract God and yet someone does get saved, it must be for God’s own sovereign purpose according to His own good pleasure and absolutely cannot be because of the actions of men or because of any value in men.

Nothing! Not one thing!

It must be God, in His grace, doing the choosing, since we are incapable of choosing God. And that realization leads us into the second of the Doctrines of Grace: *Unconditional Election*.

CHAPTER TWO
UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

The words *elect* and *election* appear some 27 times in the Bible, in both the Old and New Testament. There are over 100 references to God's *chosen* and God *choosing*. Yet "election" is one of the most misunderstood doctrinal concepts in all of Christendom. The primary question we must answer is, "Who chooses who?"

The easiest way to comprehend the basic premise of election is with a few simple questions and answers. Whenever I am discussing the issue with anyone, I start with this conversation:

Do you believe you are saved?

Yes.

Okay, then who saved you?

God.

Very good. And did God save you on purpose or by accident?

Well, on purpose!

That's election.

God saves some people and He does it on purpose.

For a more theological explanation, Pastor David Morris defines election this way:

"Because of man's Total Depravity and inability, salvation from sin and its penalty is completely of the Lord, our Triune God. In eternity past, before the worlds were created, God chose in Christ a great multitude that no man could number. The election of this number out of the mass of damnation of ruined mankind as they stood in Adam was based on God's grace and good pleasure and on nothing in man by way of condition or foreseen quality. God purposed this election for His own glory."¹

That's quite a mouthful. But it is utterly Biblical. Given that Scripture

condemns men as depraved, evil, sinful, ruined, incapable, dead worms, while also knowing that some of them obtain eternal salvation from a Just and Holy God, we are forced to ask how such a thing is possible.

As stated earlier, most every Christian church admits that God does some choosing in Scripture. The debate is over the conditions that inspire those choices and the extent of His creation over which God exercises His right to choose.

The Doctrines of Grace contend that God's election is *unconditional*. After all, there can be nothing in the ruined sinner that God finds either attractive or good enough to obligate God to save him. Consider these reasons:

- As was stated in Pastor Morris's definition, this election took place "before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4), prior to any man doing anything at all. So, the acts of men could not be a consideration in God's choosing, inasmuch as He chose prior to every action of every man.
- The very nature of this election is by pure and sovereign grace. As such, it cannot be conditioned on any attribute of the person being elected, or else "grace is no more grace." The very definition of grace is *unmerited favor or kindness*. Any action by God toward the salvation of men that is conditioned on something performed by that man is a reward, and *not* an unmerited gift.

Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And, if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But, if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work (Romans 11:5-6).

∞ THE VOCABULARY OF ELECTION

We cannot consider Biblical election without including several other terms and principles, such as *foreordination*, *foreknowledge*, and *predestination*. It is not true, as some would have us believe, that election is strictly a New Testament doctrine or that the Apostle Paul introduced it into the Scripture. God's right and ability to choose the destiny of His creation is intrinsic to *all* of Scripture. For instance, the Bible speaks of God sovereignly choosing:

- Nations (such as Israel)
- Individuals (such as Moses, David and Paul)
- Remnants (such as the 7,000 who had not bowed their knee to Baal)
- Times (such as the feasts and Sabbaths), and
- Places (such as the city of Jerusalem, the land of Israel, and the particular segments of land which each tribe would inhabit)

It is *characteristic* of a King that he rule over his kingdom. God is Lord over His creation and He is actively involved in every facet of His domain. As such, He decrees or chooses from His infinite options:

- *What* will take place
- *How* it will affect every other event, and
- *Who* will be involved in each event

Theologians call that *foreordination*—decreeing that events will take place prior to their actual occurrence. Also, in describing the qualities of God, the Christian Church has for centuries used these terms:

- *Omnipotent*—He is absolutely *all powerful*.
- *Omnipresent*—He is absolutely *everywhere at once*.
- *Omniscient*—He *knows* absolutely *everything*.

Now, if God is *all-powerful*, there is nothing in His kingdom that can occur without Him empowering it; otherwise there is some power independent of Him and He is not truly all-powerful.

Secondly, if He is *everywhere at once*, His participation in the events of His kingdom must extend to the minutest details; otherwise He is absent from somewhere.

And thirdly, if He is *all-knowing*, no event could escape His grasp. Nothing happens independent of Him or which surprises Him, and He is completely aware of every option and the consequences of every action.

Given these attributes, we must conclude that:

- God *knows* every event that takes place in His Universe.
- God *is present* at every event.
- God *empowers* every event.

But, the Bible goes one step further and also declares that God has decided every event that takes place in His domain and that nothing takes place that He did not foreordain. *From the largest—*

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God (Romans 13:1),

to the smallest detail—

The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord (Proverbs 16:33).

From the seemingly inconsequential—

Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and, one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father (Matthew 10:29),

to the most intimate—

Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off (Psalm 139:2).

In God's response to Job in Chapters 38 through 41, God lists the extent and completeness of His control over His creation. He includes everything from measuring and constructing the universe, to feeding every baby animal, to binding and controlling Satan himself.

When we speak of *Unconditional Election* it is necessary to realize that God has the right as Lord and King, and has the power as the Almighty, to do whatever He chooses with what He has created.

And, all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? (Daniel 4:35)

For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible; whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him; and he is before all things, and by him all things consist (Colossians 1:16-17).

Whatever God does, He does it for His greatest glory. All things exist because He chose to create them and decreed that they would exist. Nothing exists outside of His sovereign rule and all things bow to the will of Him who created them. He does what He does in accordance with His own will. And that includes saving people.

∞ PREDESTINATION

Now with that foundation we can understand *predestination*. The word simply means what it looks like—God determines the destination of men in advance and He has the power to complete that determination. That is the only way anyone would end up in Heaven. Just as He had the power to expel the first rebels from the Garden, He has the power to return any or all of their offspring to His presence.

Ruined by Adam’s rebellion, the mass of humanity continues marching toward Hell like lemmings off a cliff. It is their nature and their desire to go their own way, which way will certainly lead to destruction:

“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat” (Matthew 7:13).

But God, willing to show His mercy and demonstrate his grace, elected certain individuals—guilty sinners—and determined that they would go another way, which way would lead to salvation:

“Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:14).

Paul was adept at utilizing this language of election. He put it all together for us in the following passage, often referred to as the “golden chain of redemption.”

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified (Romans 8:29-30).

As we move through the five individual Doctrines of Grace, you will notice how beautifully this one verse encapsulates them:

1. "...whom He did predestinate" (election)
2. "them he also called" (irresistible grace)
3. "whom He called, them He justified" (limited atonement)
4. "and, whom He justified, them He also glorified." (perseverance of the saints)

We'll revisit this passage later and you will understand how all the pieces fit. But for the moment, notice Paul's very specific language. "Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate ... whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified." There is only one group of people in this process. The people who start out "fore-known" are the very same people who end up "glorified." Also notice that there isn't a single hint of these people adding their own participation to the process. They are not the actors; they are the recipients of God's gracious action.

∞ WHAT GOD KNOWS

Romans 8:29, however, is also a favorite verse of Arminian theologians. They typically pounce on the word "foreknow" and use it as their proof-text that God knew something favorable or admirable about these people, which knowledge encouraged Him to call, justify and glorify them. But, given what we understand about Total Depravity, God could have known nothing but evil about them. So, He could not have based his ordination on their merit. God could not have foreknown that they would have good works, because Scripture argues that good works are the result of predestination, not the cause:

We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10).

Likewise, God could not have foreknown that they would have faith since faith, itself, is a gift of God, given to those whom He has already chosen.

As many as were ordained to eternal life believed (Acts 13:48).

Notice that Acts 13:48 does not say, “as many as believed were ordained to eternal life.” First eternal life was foreordained and then God gave them the ability to believe.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

This verse clearly tells us that the gift of faith was an act of grace and we are saved by means of that gracious gift. Inasmuch as it is a gift of grace, we are neither saved, nor do we receive the gift, based on our works because it is the nature of sinful men to become arrogant and boastful if they had any part in securing their redemption.

Plus, to iterate the point, grace by definition is *an act of unmerited favor by God*. If God gave faith to a man based on some quality within the man, that would be merited, or earned, favor—not grace.

As well, when Paul listed the gifts of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:9, among the more popularly touted gifts like healings, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits and divers kinds of tongues, he included: “To another, faith by the same Spirit.” Now, if it is the Holy Spirit of God that imbues men with faith, how could God count any man’s faith as a positive merit that deserved salvation?

Neither did God see in advance that certain men would join the Church in order to merit God’s favor. Rather, God added to the body of Christ those He had chosen for salvation:

... And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:47).

Note carefully that Acts 2:47 does not say, “Certain people decided to join the church and as a consequence God saved them.” Nope. It says just the opposite! God added to the body of Christ those whom He intended to save.

And God did not see in advance that certain men—certain dead, wicked, incapable men—would choose Him.

You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you ... (John 15:16)

... no man can come unto me, except it be given unto him of the Father (John 6:65).

In other words, election is not *ratification*. God did not ratify our choice of Him, or our faith in Him, by choosing us in return. He did not say, "I approve of your choice of me, so I elect you."

Likewise, election is not *selection*. Selection comes into play when we compare several different choices and pick the best one. We grab the ripest tomatoes or the best deal on a new car. God did not select. There were no good choices! But, God chose graciously.

Finally, to lay any misinterpretation to rest, if Paul had indeed intended to say what the Arminian interpreters claim Romans 8:29-30 says, then he has utterly contradicted himself, given the context of the verse. Follow Paul's logic:

- Back in Romans 1:29-32 Paul claimed that men are absolutely ruined, not having the remotest interest in God. How could God foresee that they were totally uninterested in Him and yet see at the same time that they would choose to serve Christ?
- Romans 2:11 states, "For there is no respect of persons (external appearance or persona) with God." How could God choose men on the basis of their actions without having respect for some and contradicting His own word?
- Romans 3:9-18 states that there are "none righteous" and none seek after God. Paul uses picturesque language to describe their awful state: "They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable, there is none that doeth good." Their throat is an open grave. Their tongues are deceitful. Their lips are poisonous. Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their ways. The way of peace they have not known. And there is no fear of God before their eyes."

Now, after Paul has taken pains to describe mankind in its natural state, how could he have argued in Romans 8:29-30 that God foresaw that some men would have faith, choose God or do works righteous enough to obligate God to elect them to salvation? Paul would be turning his own

argument upside down, completely contradicting himself. He would certainly not be the logician or theologian the church has reputed him to be. And, the Holy Spirit was certainly not inspiring him as he wrote, since he was obviously prone to blatant error. What should be immediately plain is that the Arminian interpretation of Paul's writing leads to conundrums and confusion.

The apparent confusion on the part of the Arminian contingency is based on a misunderstanding of the scope of the Greek word *proginosko*, translated *foreknow*. *Proginosko* is derived from two words: *pro*, or "before," and *ginosko*, "to know." It is that word *ginosko* that requires closer inspection. In Scripture, it speaks of an intimate relationship. It is an experiential *knowing* that only comes from deep, personal love. We find this relationship defined throughout the Bible:

And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived ...
(Genesis 4:1)

Adam did not just meet his wife, know her as a person, and she became instantaneously pregnant. They had a deep, personal, experiential union.

[Lot said] Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man... (Genesis 19:8)

The girls knew Lot, so they knew what men were. They had brothers, so they were familiar with the species. But, they had never had a sexual union with a man—they were virgins.

[God said] You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities (Amos 3:2).

God, being omniscient, was familiar with other people on the planet. But He only had an intimate relationship, which God likened to a marriage, with the children of Israel.

And, [Joseph] knew her not till she had brought forth her first-born son; and he called his name JESUS (Matthew 1:25).

Rather obviously, Joseph was familiar with Mary; they were betrothed to marry. But he refrained from having a sexual union with her until after she delivered the Christ child.

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Matthew 7:21-23).

Jesus is saying this to men who believed that their righteous works ought to merit salvation. But He cast them off due to the fact that He never had an intimate, experiential, love relationship with them. Notice, by the way, that if God chose to save simply on the basis of foreseen works and actions, these men would certainly have been worthy of election!

However, whom God loved and began an intimate relationship with, them “he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son.”

≈ WHEN DID THE ELECTION TAKE PLACE?

Does God place people into a state of “election” at the moment of their conversion? Do sinners decide to follow God and earn this “election” as a consequence of their decision? Or, do we even participate in this process at all?

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will (Ephesians 1:4).

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will (Ephesians 1:11).

Prior to creating the first molecule of the universe, God determined the recipients of His love and gracious election. Then, to make the whole thing sure and certain, He wrote their names in the Lamb's Book of Life. The names of all the elect are written in the book.

This concept of an eternal book of names appears several places in Scripture. For instance, Jesus told His disciples in Luke 10:20 to rejoice because their names were "written in Heaven." Daniel 12:1 speaks of a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time. But, he promised that "every one that shall be found written in the book" would be delivered. Or, in Revelation 20:15 we read, "And, whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

So, it's a fair question to ask, when was this infinitely important book written?

The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is (Revelation 17:8).

This unconditional election took place before God created the Earth. When He decreed to create men, He authored a book of names, determining the people He would gift to His Son. Then He set about the work of keeping His word.

≈ FROM THE BEGINNING

As already stated, it is *characteristic* of God to pick and choose. So we ought to find evidence of God's election all through Scripture, starting at the beginning. And, we do!

After Adam and Eve rebelled and realized their shame and nakedness, "they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day" and they hid. God was fully aware of their disobedience and was certainly under no obligation to seek them out. He could just as easily have passed them by. But, He chose to confront them. And He

mercifully made animal skins to clothe them, foreshadowing the ultimate sacrificial Lamb who would die to cover sin.

As He confronted the serpent, God said, "...I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed..." (Genesis 3:15) God divided all of humanity into two camps—the seed of the woman and the seed of Satan—and He put hostility between them. He blessed the seed of the woman, which is Christ singularly and the heritage of Christ in the larger sense. And He cursed the devil and all of the descendants of wickedness. But, importantly, God drew the dividing line before Adam and Eve had borne their first child.

Then the two sons of Adam, Cain and Abel, raised by the same parents in the same environment, each sacrificed to God. Cain brought the fruit of the ground, the product of his own labor. Abel brought the firstling of his flock, a sacrifice with blood in it.

...And, the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering:
but unto Cain and to his offering He had no respect. And,
Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell (Genesis 4:4-5).

So Cain slew Abel. Why did God not respect both offerings? Why had God not revealed to both brothers what type of sacrifice was acceptable?

Answer: *Sovereign election.*

In the chapter on Total Depravity we looked at Genesis 6:5 - "And, God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." As a result, God chose to destroy the world with a flood. But...!

But, Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD (Genesis 6:8).

Noah received unmerited favor from God! The Hebrew word translated "found" means "became the recipient of." It does not imply that Noah was even looking for it! Out of the legions of ruined sinners and wicked rebels God elected one man and his seven relatives before He destroyed the whole world. He did it by grace.

Now, some will argue that Genesis 6:9 states that Noah was "a just man and perfect in his generations." That, they claim, is the basis for God's choice. Not only would that negate the "grace" that Noah received,

but even if we were to conclude that Noah was spared because he was just or perfect, the same could not be said of his sons and daughters, as proven by the curse Noah would later place on Ham...to say nothing of Noah's later bout of drunkenness.

Later in Genesis we read that God chose Abram and gave him Isaac long after he and his wife were too old to bear children. God told Abram:

And, I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall of families of the earth be blessed (Genesis 12:2-3).

When God declared this to Abram, he was an idol worshipper! (Joshua 24:2) But, God elected him. Genesis 15:6 states, "And he (Abraham) believed in the Lord; and he [God] counted it to him for righteousness." Abraham had faith (an unmerited gift) and God imputed righteousness to him, because He had chosen Abraham to be the father of the faithful.

Prior to the birth of Isaac, Abraham produced a son with his wife's handmaid. The boy's name was Ishmael. But, God refused to give the promised inheritance to that boy. Rather, God insisted that a true son, a miraculous son, would be counted as the seed. But, the other was rejected. The Apostle Paul inculcated that bit of history into his theology.

That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed (Romans 9:8).

God chooses and God rejects, according to His good pleasure and purpose. Meanwhile, Isaac had twin sons, Jacob and Esau. God chose Jacob and rejected Esau while they were yet in the womb. Paul saw this as clear and exacting evidence of God's work of election.

And, not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but

of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated (Romans 9:10-13).

God did not elect Jacob on the basis of personal merit. He was still in the womb and had not yet done anything. And, to ward off any debate that the choice was made on the basis of any foreseen acts by the twins, Paul added “not of works, but of Him that calls.” Notice, as well, that God spoke of His love and hatred in the past tense. These things were predetermined and foreordained.

After Jacob’s name had been changed to Israel, he had twelve sons. Joseph was one of the youngest and his brethren were jealous of him. But, God gave Joseph a dream that his brothers would bow to him. His brothers sought to kill him and they sold him into slavery. God ordered the events of their lives until Joseph became the most powerful man in Egypt. Meanwhile, his brothers nearly perished in the famine God brought. Certainly enough, the brothers bowed to Joseph and they found mercy in his sight. Why was this younger son raised to prominence? Sovereign election.

These twelve sons of Jacob became the namesakes of the twelve tribes of Israel. And, of all the nations and tribes and families of the earth, God bestowed His favor on them.

For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth (Deuteronomy 7:6).

Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen: Thus saith the Lord that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou Jeshurun, whom I have chosen (Isaiah 44:1-2).

God chose one tribe, the Levites, to be His ministers among the Israelites.

For the Lord thy God hath chosen him [Levi] out of all thy tribes, to stand to minister in the name of the Lord, him and his sons forever (Deuteronomy 18:5).

God chose King Saul for Israel, even telling them that he would be a ruinous king over them (1 Samuel 10:24). Then God chose King David.

... thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly (Psalm 22:9-10).

He chose David also his servant, and took him from the sheep-folds (Psalm 78:70).

These two verses confirm that David was not chosen because he was God's servant; he was chosen to be God's servant while he was still in the womb.

God chose prophets. God chose kings. God chose the winners in battle. Would any argue that when the Egyptian Pharaoh ordered the death of every Hebrew baby, it was the electing grace of God that floated Moses right into Pharaoh's household?

During His earthly ministry, Jesus also exercised his right to pick and choose. For instance, He handpicked each of His twelve apostles, including the one who was ordained to betray Him.

Jesus answered them, "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? He spake of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve" (John 6:70-71).

When Jesus was at the pool of Bethesda, hundreds of sick, blind and lame people were gathered, superstitiously waiting for an angel to "trouble the water" in hopes of being healed (John 5). But Jesus went to one particular man who had been sick for 38 years and healed him. Jesus left that crowd in the same wretched condition He had found them and chose to heal one man.

On another occasion, Jesus' disciples asked Him why He taught in parables.

And, he said unto them, "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them" (Mark 4:11-12).

We can conclude nothing else from these passages than that Jesus was not predisposed to reveal Himself to every individual person with deference to all. Just the opposite is true. God gave understanding to the elect and Jesus cloaked the truths of Heaven in parables to guarantee that the non-elect would not be converted by their wills or intellects and try to obligate Jesus to forgive them.

Why did Jesus raise Lazarus from the grave? He chose to. There were plenty of other dead people around. Why did He cleanse the ten lepers when the disease ravaged hundreds of other people? He chose to. When Jesus came upon the demoniac of the Gadarenes, the demons who called themselves "Legion" requested that Jesus allow them to go into a herd of pigs. "And, forthwith, Jesus gave them leave" (Mark 5:13). Why? He chose to.

Even as the call of God to follow Christ and believe on Him is heralded to the world, only the elect answer.

"So, the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen" (Matthew 20:16).

∞ CHRISTOCENTRICITY

The most magnificent demonstration of God's election came to us in the gracious person of His Son. This is the beauty that lies at the heart of this doctrine. It is a completely *Christocentric* doctrine. It has Christ at its center and it revolves around the Son of God. Christ is the "Elect of God."

Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded (1 Peter 2:6).

And, I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob and out of Judah an inheritor of my mountains: and mine elect shall inherit it and my servants shall dwell there (Isaiah 65:9).

Isaiah 42 is one of the most beautiful Messianic passages in the Old Testament. It begins:

Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.

Even as Christ is designated to be “the lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8), He was the “firstfruit” of the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20,21), elected of God to be the Messiah and the Christ (the anointed one). And, we believers who are the “elect of God” find the basis of our election in Christ, Himself. When writing to the church, Peter addresses them thusly:

Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied (1 Peter 1:2).

The blood of the elect servant of God purchased our redemption and sanctification, completing the plan of election.

∞ THE ATTRIBUTES OF ELECTION

So, if all the foregoing is true, there certainly ought to be both evidence and benefits associated with being among “the elect of God.” And, sure enough, Scripture is jam-packed with them. Below are ten examples:

1. Once the concept of God’s electing grace is understood, we are no longer burdened with the crushing weight of our own vain attempts to earn salvation by our works. Now, election does not preclude good works. That’s important to know. But, we do not accomplish our salvation via our work and effort. Rather, we do good works in response to the fact that we have been chosen by God. And, just as we are not the

cause of God's election, we are not the ultimate cause of our own good works. Salvation, in every aspect, is God's enterprise, starting with His choice of us as His people, ordained to perform works that glorify and reflect Him. Election by God is to good works, for His glory and our benefit:

“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you” (John 15:16).

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10).

2. God controls the course of history and has promised that when He judges the world in His anger, He will limit the duration of His wrath for the sake of His elect people:

“And, except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened” (Matthew 24:22).

3. God protects the elect so that false prophets will not misguide them:

“For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matthew 24:24).

4. The elect will be found in Heaven and accompany Christ when he returns to execute judgement on the earth:

“And, he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matthew 24:31).

These shall make war with the Lamb and the Lamb shall overcome them: for He is Lord of lords and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful (Revelation 17:14).

5. God fights for His elect and executes justice for their sakes:

“And, shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?” (Luke 18:7)

They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are, the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the LORD and their offspring with them. And, it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear (Isaiah 65:22-24).

6. God justifies His elect and no one can judge them:

Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth (Romans 8:33).

7. The very nature and character of God’s elect is changed, reflecting the attributes of God, rather than the sinful world:

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye (Colossians 3:12-13).

8. God sends ministers to teach the elect in order to lead them to salvation:

Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sakes, that they may

also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory (2 Timothy 2:10).

9. Even the angels in Heaven who did not join Lucifer in his rebellion against God were kept by gracious election:

I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality (1 Timothy 5:21).

10. Faith in Jesus Christ, understanding of the truth of the Gospel, and the hope of eternal life are given to the elect:

Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began (Titus 1:1-2).

The hope of eternal life was promised by God to whom?
To the elect!

≈ REPROBATION

Though it is not directly our subject, we must also consider one of the most misunderstood implications of this Doctrine of Unconditional Election: *Reprobation*. If humanity is willfully marching toward certain damnation and God chooses to “pluck some brands from the fire,” is He, by omission, committing the rest to destruction?

This is a favorite argument by the critics of this doctrine. The core of their objection is: “If God has the power to save sinners from their fate, why doesn't He save them all? Election of only some is unfair!” The critics of historic Calvinism call this idea “double predestination” in order to create a paradigm where God destines people to hell in some cruel or capricious way. Then, they argue that Calvinistic theology makes God out to be a monster, and must therefore be rejected.

But, such emotional appeals aside, the simple and direct answer is: Yes, in saving only a remnant, God is reprobating the remainder. But, we must be cautious not to lay blame to God. The apostle Paul argued convincingly on this point.

Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will He hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, even us whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? (Romans 9:18-24)

Follow Paul's argument closely. In the first three chapters of his epistles to the Romans, Paul took pains to prove that Gentiles were guilty before God, then Jews and Israelites were guilty before God, concluding that all mankind stands guilty, sinful and deserving of judgment and punishment. However, God will have mercy, sparing some people from the judgment they deserve. How does God decide which people will be treated mercifully? We're not told. We simply know that God will be merciful to whoever He chooses.

Now, the rest God will leave in their sins. So, the gainsayer will reply, "But how can God blame anyone if everyone is just doing what God ordained them to do?" Paul immediately declared the sovereignty of God and reminded the questioner that we are simply dust in the hands of the Creator. Will the dust rise up and ask the Omnipotent why He does what He does? The implied answer is, "Of course not!" God owns everything. He is the Master of His creation. Who can question His decisions?

Then Paul reminded his readers of a lesson learned in Jeremiah 18. A potter has the power to do whatever he pleases with a lump of clay. From that same lump he may fashion beautiful works of art, worthy to be

praised. Or, he may make vessels that are displeasing to him, or for common use, which he has the right to destroy according to his own pleasure. God has the same power to make choices and distinctions that the potter has. Both the chosen and judged have their place in the ongoing revelation of God. He is perfectly willing to show His wrath on the vessels He is reserving for the time of judgment. But, He is patient and longsuffering, waiting for the time when He will show His glorious grace and mercy on those He has foreordained to salvation.

The argument that such reprobation is unfair or unjust misses the point. Justice and fairness would have demanded that all men be cast into Hell in accordance with their evil, rebellious character. But, God is not the root cause of any man's destruction. Men are willingly following the inclinations of their wicked hearts and, as such, are completely responsible for their actions. And, God will get glory for Himself, both in demonstrating His mercy to His elect and in demonstrating His holy justice and righteous power to the sinners.

Here's an important concept, not to be missed: *God does whatever He does for His glory.* Salvation redounds to God's glorious grace. Judgment redounds to God's glorious righteousness and holiness. But, it all redounds to Him and His glorification of Himself. The humanistic view that God must treat everyone equally and give every man a chance to be saved is foreign to Scripture. It can be very difficult for us, in our limited understanding of truly eternal principles, to wrap our minds around a God of such limitless self-determination. But that is the only God we find in the Bible. Rather than kick against God's revelation of Himself, we would be much wiser to worship Him and bow humbly before His sovereign decrees. But, natural men, like brute beasts, refuse to accept the authority of God.

Meanwhile, Paul continued his treatise on God's electing grace by recounting Isaac's twin boys:

As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For He saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So, then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy (Romans 9:13-16).

To me, it is not at all amazing that God would say, “Esau have I hated.” God abhors sin in every form and instance. It is amazing, however, that the grace of God would announce “Jacob have I loved.” Jacob was a heel-catcher, a supplanter. But, he was the recipient of “unmerited favor.” What we stated at the beginning of this chapter is born out in this verse—God’s loving foreknowledge is the basis of his gracious, unconditional election and He is not swayed by men who exercise their will or run hard to compete in the marathon of good works. Election is truly the activity of God, who shows mercy as He wills. According to Jesus, God graciously elects some, bringing them to faith, while His wrath abides on others.

He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him (John 3:36).

Does that make God unrighteous? No! It makes Him gracious. Righteousness is defined by what God does. God does not answer to some ethical standard above Himself. It is up to God whom He will be merciful to and who receives His compassion.

The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil (Proverbs 16:4).

“I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things ... Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker!” (Isaiah 45:7-9)

God is not overthrown, or limited in the slightest, by the evil workings of men or devils. God created all things for one purpose - His own Glory. God is not eternally frustrated in His divine plan of redemption by those who fail to believe. He foreordained their unbelief and they are every wit constrained by that Sovereign will. The truth is cloaked and hidden from them; their eyes are blinded, their ears are deafened and they cannot come to Christ. Jesus Christ is the dividing line of all human history by which all men are assigned to their appointed pre-destiny.

[Christ is] a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed (1 Peter 2:8).

For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation; ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ (Jude 4).

And, for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12).

Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you (Acts 13:41).

∞ CONCLUSION

Even if we did not have the abundance of Scriptural proofs to declare this Doctrine of Unconditional Election, logic would force us to conclude that:

If—

- Man is completely ruined and dead in trespasses and sins;
- Man has no desire for a relationship with God and is rebellious against God;
- Man is incapable of understanding anything about God or doing any meritorious work which would obligate God;
- Yet, some men do learn of God, worship God, and are rewarded with eternal life in God's presence;

Then, the only way this would be possible is for God to initiate the action for no reason other than His own will and good pleasure. Is this mysterious? Yes, absolutely. But, does the fact that it is mysterious mean that we should avoid it? No. This is the truth of God's own revealed religion, ordained before the world began.

Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not

the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory (1 Corinthians 2:6-7).

So, out of the mass of ruined humanity, God chose to set His love on some people and determined to save them. What was the method of that salvation? What motivated it? Well, it was motivated by God's love, which He chose to set upon His elect people.

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:10).

So, what was the method? The propitiation secured by His Son. And, that is the subject of the third of the Doctrines of Grace—the doctrine of *Limited Atonement*.

¹ Morris, David. *The Doctrines of Grace*. (Teaching series from Main Street Baptist Church, Sovereign Grace Conference. 1989.)

CHAPTER THREE
LIMITED ATONEMENT

Some theologians prefer to use the term *Particular Redemption* when considering this doctrinal concept. It deals with the fundamental question, “For whom did Christ die?” Did He hang on the cross for every man who ever lived, without exception? Or, did Jesus die for the elect of God exclusively?

The debate centers on the necessary consequences of either position. The Bible clearly states that not everyone will be saved. So, if Christ died for everyone without exception, then He merely made salvation possible. He arranged for everyone to have the means of salvation if they would just take advantage of it. However, if Christ actually finished the work of redemption - if His death was completely sufficient and effective in securing salvation for guilty sinners - then the very fact that not everyone is saved forces us to conclude that Christ died only for His elect people.

In order to establish our theology on this issue, we have to know what actually took place on Calvary. All of Christianity revolves around this central event – the crucifixion of Jesus. Orthodox Christianity has always taught that Jesus Christ was (and is) the Son of God, a member of the Triune Godhead.

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power (Colossians 2:8-10).

When pressed for proof of His deity, however, Jesus declared that the “sign of Jonah”—who spent three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish—was the only sign God would give as proof that Jesus was who He said He was (Matthew 12:39-40). Likewise, said Christ, He would spend three days and nights in the “heart of the earth.”

The earliest eyewitnesses testified that Christ actually died on the cross, was in the grave three days and nights and rose again, “according to the Scriptures.” Without this amazing fact of history, Christianity is just another religious freak show brought into the world by liars and kept alive by “false witnesses of God” (1 Corinthians 15:15). These events are the very core of Christianity.

The crucifixion of Jesus is a verifiable historic fact. Even Tacitus, the Roman historian, recorded that the person, Jesus of Nazareth, lived and was crucified.

He wrote:

“But all human effort, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration (the burning of Rome) was the result of an order (from Nero, himself). Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, (Christ Jesus) from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and the most mischievous superstition [Christianity] thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car. Hence, even for criminals who deserve extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man’s cruelty, that they (the Christians) were being destroyed.”¹

Both Biblical and secular historic sources agree that the man called Christ was crucified under the jurisdiction of Pilate and that his followers died under extreme torture holding to the conviction that Jesus both died and rose again. But, to the man searching for truth and redemption, it is vital to know more than just the physical facts of the event. We must know the eternal, spiritual implications of this cataclysmic moment.

☞ WHAT WAS CHRIST ACCOMPLISHING
ON THAT CROSS?

Immediately after Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden, we read of the brothers Cain and Abel. Abel offered a sacrifice to God; “the firstling of his flock and the fat thereof.” The phrase “and the fat thereof” indicates that Abel slew the lamb as a sacrifice. Why was that necessary? Because Abel was seeking God’s forgiveness for sin. And, he found it. The Lord had respect unto Abel and his offering (Genesis 4:4).

That concept of sacrificially shedding blood for the remission of sin continued through the time of Noah, who took clean animals, appropriate for sacrifice, into the ark by sevens, and unclean by twos (Genesis 7:2). No sooner were Noah and his family on dry ground than he built an altar and sacrificed from among the clean animals (Genesis 8:20).

Sacrifice to God continued through the time of Abraham, the progenitor of the Hebrews. When He was told to sacrifice his only son, He assured the boy, “My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering.” (Genesis 22:8) As Abraham lifted the knife, an angel of the Lord stopped his hand and immediately a goat was found with his horns caught in a thicket. God supplied a substitute sacrifice to die in Isaac’s stead, a ram with a head of thorns (Genesis 22:9-13).

Sacrifice for sin carried over into the Levitical Law and God required blood at the hands of the high priests to temporarily alleviate His wrath and punishment:

And, almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission (Hebrews 9:22).

But, this continuous slaughter of animals was never sufficient to actually atone for the guilt of the men who offered those sacrifices:

For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices, which they offered year by year continually, make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? Because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But, in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins (Hebrews 10:1-4).

Animal sacrifice was commanded by God to remind men of their sinful estate. The shed blood was a testimony to the fact that sin requires death. The Hebrews' author goes on to declare that only the single, vicarious death of Jesus on the cross was effective in actually removing the guilt and punishment that sin demands. Historically, God has always commanded blood sacrifice. But, the ultimate sacrifice, which spilled the precious blood of God Himself, brought the bloodshed to an end.

Scripture tells us that Jesus accomplished several things when He willingly gave Himself to be crucified. An overview of those eight accomplishments sheds a great deal of light on the question at hand – for whom did Christ die?

1. He became the ultimate and final substitutionary *sacrifice* for sin.

For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but, now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself (Hebrews 9:24-26).

Christ sacrificed Himself one time for the purpose of putting away sin, fulfilling the “type” of all the animal sacrifices that could not satisfy the debt of sin.

And, every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, [Christ] after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God (Hebrews 10:11-12).

Why was Christ able to sit down after sacrificing Himself? Because He finished the work He had come to Earth to accomplish - He put away sin forever. And, He was seated at God's right hand, a position of power and authority, testifying that God accepted the sacrifice and the completion thereof.

2. In describing the death of Christ, Paul borrowed a heathen word, *propitiation*. The ancient heathens believed that the hardships in their lives were the result of angry gods. So, they set out to appease that anger. For instance, they would sacrifice their children to the "fires of Molech" (Leviticus 18:21), into the red-hot hands of metal gods who had furnaces burning within. They believed that the screams and eventual death of the babies would "propitiate," or put-off, the wrath of their gods.

Jesus Christ was a *propitiatory sacrifice* who offered Himself up to appease the wrath of God Almighty.

Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God (Romans 3:25).

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:10).

3. Christ *redeemed* fallen sinners in His death. The Greek word translated *redemption* is *exagorazo* meaning *to buy out*. It had the particular implication of buying a slave in order to set him free. The Greek word *lutro* translated *to redeem* means *to release in receipt of ransom* with the emphasis on the actual release of the slave, since his price was paid.

Christ referred to sinners as "servant (or bond slave) to sin" (John 8:34). And, Paul declared "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Meanwhile, God's holy justice, which demanded the sinner's penalty, had

to be satisfied. Our sins needed to be remitted. But, “without the shedding of blood there is no remission” (Hebrews 9:22).

The picture is clear. Sinners are bond slaves on the market of sin. And only the sacrifice of one whose blood is worth enough can purchase sinners and set them free! So, with the price of His own blood in His hand, Christ stood before the justice and righteousness of God and bought the guilty slaves—redeeming them:

For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:23-24).

Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us (Hebrews 9:12).

Notice that Christ only had to enter into God’s presence once to complete the transaction, and the redemption Christ purchased was eternal redemption. Therefore, the redeemed one is fully paid for and can never again be enslaved.

4. In the same manner, Christ was the *ransom* for guilty sinners. The ransom was the price actually paid to release someone from a debt. Dead sinners owed a debt they were incapable of paying. But, Christ was the sufficient price to pay that debt and buy back the property that was seized in the debt foreclosure.

Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:28)

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

5. Christ was on the cross making *reconciliation* between God and men. He was bringing together two sides that had previously been at odds with each other. Not that God needed to be reconciled to man, but men were

doomed to destruction if they were not reconciled to God.

Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people (Hebrews 2:17).

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life (Romans 5:10).

Paul said that if, while we were rebels who hated God, Jesus brought us back together by His death on the cross, then we know for certain that, since we have been reconciled, we will most certainly be saved by His resurrection. Our reconciliation to God was achieved when Christ paid for our sin debt and removed our trespasses. Thus, reconciliation through the shed blood of Christ is our guarantee of safe standing before the Judge of Eternity.

6. Christ's death *justified* guilty sinners. That is a legal, or judicial, term used to indicate that a person has been declared righteous. It does not mean that the elect are necessarily made perfect in and of themselves.

In other words, sinners are not made personally holy and righteous in order to be accepted before God. Rather, they are declared to be sinless despite their lives and obvious guilt. God looks on them as though they had never sinned because Christ bore their sins for them. Then, they are judicially "imputed" a righteousness they gained from Christ's own perfection and finished work.

The Bible teaches three great imputations:

- Adam's sin is imputed to every man, evidenced by the fact that all men die.

- The sins of the elect were placed on Christ at Calvary, imputing their guilt to Him.
- Christ's own personal righteousness is imputed to believers.

But, the point for the moment is that Christ actually, wholly and completely justified those for whom He died.

He [God] shall see of the travail of his [Christ's] soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities (Isaiah 53:11).

“Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses”
(Acts 13:38-39).

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:23-24).

He [Abraham] staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification (Romans 4:20-25).

7. Christ *sanctified* these justified ones; meaning that He *set them apart* for God's private use. The Greek term translated *sanctified* is *hagiazō*, from the root *hagios*, which is usually translated *holy*. They both have the same root meaning, which is to be *set apart* or *separated* by God for His exclusive purpose.

By the which will [God's will] we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Hebrews 10:10).

For both he that sacrificeth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren (Hebrews 2:11).

And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:11).

8. In sanctifying His people, Christ *perfected* them, or made them complete, enabling them to stand before a Righteous, Holy God.

For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified (Hebrews 10:14).

And if they are perfected forever, then they can never again be held guilty.

To iterate, this is an *imputed* perfection. God held Christ as personally, legally guilty for the sins of the people for whom He was the vicarious sacrifice. God poured out His wrath on His Son, instead of on the sinners who deserved it. Then, God held the redeemed sinners as personally, legally innocent! He sees them as sanctified and holy, completed and perfect, as a result of Christ's atoning work.

In summary, Scripture tells us that Jesus on the cross:

1. Was the final substitutionary sacrifice for sin.
2. Offered the propitiation that fully satisfied the wrath of God.
3. Paid the redemption price to purchase guilty sinners.
4. Was the ransom price that was paid.
5. Made reconciliation between man and God.
6. Justified guilty sinners, satisfying God's holy justice.
7. Sanctified those people, or set them apart as holy.
8. Perfected forever those whom He bought, justified and sanctified.

And, by Christ's own declaration on the cross, "It is finished." He actually accomplished all these things in his death and resurrection.

With this in mind, let us again ask the question:

≈ FOR WHOM DID CHRIST DIE?

If Christ died for the whole world—every person who ever lived, without distinction—then He also accomplished all the purposes of His death for every one of those people. Nowhere in Scripture do we find language to suggest that the attributes of Christ’s atoning work are applied to different individuals in varying degrees. It’s all or nothing at all.

Not only that, but the Bible does not suggest that Christ did all this work and then left it unapplied, waiting for someone to take advantage of it. When He said it was finished, it was finished. He had actually accomplished what He set out to do.

I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was (John 17:4-5).

Nor do we find any hint that something needs to be added to Christ’s work in order for it to be efficacious in a person’s life. We do not add our faith, our choice, or our decision in order to make Christ’s atonement active. He did it alone. He accomplished His purpose and sat down at the position of authority— His father’s right hand.

Given all this, we are forced to conclude that if Christ died for everyone, then surely everyone would be saved. But, we know from Scripture that this is not the case. Not everyone is saved. Some people end up eternally separated from God.

And, the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And, death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And, whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:13-15).

But, how could men who have been reconciled, redeemed, justified, sanctified and perfected be put into the lake of fire and eternally pun-

ished by a just and righteous God? If Christ paid the price of their sin, how could they be tried on their sinfulness?

The answer is, Christ was not their substitute. Their sins were not on Christ's shoulders when He bore the burden of guilt. And so we plainly declare,

Christ died as the substitute for the elect only.

As a result, the elect are already reckoned by God as being purchased, reconciled, personally innocent, holy and complete in Christ. They can never be tried for their sins, because God has removed them as far from us as the East is from the West and they will be remembered no more (Psalm 103:12). And, God will not pour out His wrath for sin on the elect, because He has once poured it out on His Son in their stead.

Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us (Hebrews 9:12).

Furthermore, the logical succession of these doctrines leads us to the conclusion that Christ did not die for all humanity. If, as we have concluded thus far, God elected certain individuals before the foundation of the world and withheld that mercy from others, He would not have sent His Son intending to pardon those whom He positively foreknew would be lost.

To represent God as earnestly striving to do what He knows He will not do is to represent Him as acting foolishly.²

Christ, Himself, demonstrated this relationship—that the elect and the redeemed are the same people—when He prayed:

And, now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have

received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee; and they have believed that thou didst send me. I pray for them. I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them (John 17:5-10).

As Christ was preparing to die and return to His former glory, which He shared with God before the world began, He listed several attributes of the particular people that God gave to Him “out of the world”:

- They were God’s, given to Christ.
- They kept God’s word.
- They knew that whatever Christ had was from God.
- Christ gave them the words God gave Him.
- They received those words.
- They knew surely that Christ came from God.
- They had faith that God sent Christ.
- Jesus prayed to God exclusively for them, because they were God’s. Notice the exact words, “I pray not for the world, but for them...”
- Christ was glorified in them.

Jesus then continued the prayer, asking His Father to bless and protect those particular people. Now, are we to assume that Christ would exclude members of “the world” from His prayer and then spill His precious blood with the intention of redeeming and perfecting those for whom He would not pray? Again, that is to say that He acted in a confused or foolish way. Do not miss the contrast Christ made between those that were His and those for whom He would not pray. Our contention that He died for His elect exclusively simply follows the distinction that Christ Himself made.

∞ THE SHEEP

To further bolster our conclusion that Jesus died to save His elect people, we need only to visit the language Jesus chose to use when speaking of His unique relationship with His chosen people. Christ often used figurative language that His First Century audience could relate to. Given their agricultural economy, livestock and shepherds were a common sight. So, Christ said,

“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth His life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

“I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep” (John 10:14-15).

So, it’s worth inquiring, “Was Christ speaking of every individual human without discrimination when He referred to His sheep?” His own speech answers that question in the negative.

“But, ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you” (John 10:26).

“When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And, before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And, he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left ... Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, ‘Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels’ ” (Matthew 25:31-33, 41).

Jesus was speaking of an exclusive group when He spoke of “My sheep.” In fact, the reason Jesus posited for the Pharisees’ incapability to understand Him was simple—they were not His sheep. Jesus sees the entire world as falling into two camps—“sheep” and “goats.” Nowhere does Jesus ever announce that His death is on behalf of the goats. Consequently, the goats end up judged and punished.

Utilizing the same “sheep” analogy, Paul attested that Christ died exclusively for the Church:

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28).

Even when speaking of the marriage relationship, Paul declared the particularity of Christ's redemptive act.

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it (Ephesians 5:25).

The Angel who spoke to Joseph about Mary's impending pregnancy told him:

"And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

And, very clearly, Jesus declared:

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but, I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you" (John 15:13-15).

Christ was speaking to His chosen apostles. He spoke of His chosen sheep. He spoke of His Church. He spoke of His people. He spoke of His friends. And He gave his life for them. The language is rife with exclusivity.

Reprobate men, who do not follow after the Lordship of Christ, are obviously not His friends, His sheep, His people or His church. Consequently, Christ did not lay down His life for them.

∞ OLD TESTAMENT TYPES

We have already noted that after Adam's fall God cursed the serpent by putting enmity, or *againstness*, between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. The Bible chronicles God's dealings with the blessed lineage of the seed of the woman, right up to "the seed" Christ (Galatians 3:16).

That line of people developed into the 12 tribes of Israel. In dealing with that chosen nation, God established three distinct offices of leadership—prophets, priests and kings. Each of those offices was a “representative” office.

For instance, when the High Priest went into the Holy of Holies once a year to sacrifice to God, He stood as a representative of God’s particular, chosen people. On His shoulders, He wore an *ephod* which was “for a memorial to the children of Israel; as the Lord commanded Moses” (Exodus 39:7). He wore a breastplate with four rows of three precious stones. “And the stones were according to the names of the children of Israel ... according to the twelve tribes” (Exodus 39:14).

The High Priest interceded on behalf of the particular people whose burden was on his shoulders and whose names were engraved in gold and precious next to his heart. He did not offer sacrifices for the sins of the world. He was not the priest of the Amalakites or the Jebusites. He was the High Priest of the children of promise, the descendants of Abraham.

The second representative office God established was the prophets. Prophets were men who spoke the word of God by divine unction. They told the people what God had to say. But, the prophets were given to Israel (Hebrews 1:1), for the benefit of God’s chosen people. The prophets of God were not sent to the Moabites or the Philistines. While they often prophesied against the heathen nations, prophets of God were raised among the houses of Israel and Judah for the purpose of teaching and exhorting God’s people.

A case in point is Moses. Moses was the prophet of God through whom the children of Israel received the Law at Mt. Sinai. That law was not given to the Gentiles. God revealed His righteous standard to particular people. That law was a “schoolmaster” which led to Christ (Galatians 3:24). So, the path of salvation was not revealed to the world at large, but only to the chosen group, via the prophets.

Third, God set up kings to rule over His chosen people. While it is true that every power that rules on Earth gets its authority from God, no king on the earth ever rose to the esteem of David, who was called a man after God’s own heart. And, every king rules over a particular kingdom. No king in history has ever accomplished universal dominion. Israel’s kings, who were chosen by God and anointed by God’s prophets, ruled over Israel exclusively.

Now, no man has ever held all three of these offices. David was a king and a prophet, but he was never a priest. Aaron was high priest and a prophet, but he was never a king. King Uzziah overstepped those bounds and tried to burn incense to God, which was a priestly activity. God smote him with leprosy until the day he died (2 Chronicles 26:16-21). Saul was a king who prophesied, but he was never a priest. All three of these representative offices were “types and shadows” which found their fulfillment in Christ Jesus.

The Prophets all prophesied of the coming Messiah:

Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and, they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers (Acts 7:52).

The Priests stood temporarily in the office of intercessor until the true Redeemer would offer His own blood as a sacrifice:

Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world; but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself (Hebrews 9:25-26).

The kings ruled over the Israel until the Son of David appeared on the stage of history, just as the kings of the earth will rule until the True King comes to conquer and claim His kingdom.

And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood (Revelation 1:5).

Jesus Christ is the *only* man ever spoken of as Prophet, Priest and King.

This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel,
A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your
brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear (Acts 7:37).

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in
times past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last
days spoken unto us by His Son ... (Hebrews 1:1-2)

For Jesus himself testified, that a prophet hath no honor in his
own country (John 4:44).

Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto
his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high
priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for
the sins of the people (Hebrews 2:17).

Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling,
consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ
Jesus (Hebrews 3:1).

That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebuk-
able, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: Which in
his times he shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate,
the King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Timothy 6:14-15).

And He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a name written,
KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS (Revelation 19:16).

Jesus Christ was the final prophet, speaking for God; He was the
highest High Priest, pouring His own blood on the “mercy seat” of God;
and He is the King over all kings.

However, in fulfilling these offices and functions, He did not
change the character or purpose they were designed to accomplish. He
is the High Priest to the elect descendants of Abraham in faith; He is the
Prophet who speaks God’s word to those He was given out of the world;
and He is the Righteous King who will reward His faithful servants and
judge the rebels.

In short, He is the fulfillment of these offices to “particular” people.

≈ THE ARMINIAN LIMITATION

Opponents of this doctrine argue that it is improper, and even presumptive, to place limits on Christ’s work. However, the truth be known, the Arminian view of “Universal Atonement” actually puts a much more stringent limitation on the redemptive work than we do.

If Christ’s death simply made salvation possible, and every individual has the atonement available provided they claim it, then Christ did not actually save anyone! The advocates of Universal Atonement would have us believe that Christ poured out the sanctifying blood of God just in case anyone ever decided to use it. But, the actual catalyst in salvation is the will of the individual who decides to put the atonement into effect in his or her own life.

While the Doctrines of Grace limit the extent of the atonement, the Arminian doctrine limits the power of it. We do not doubt that the value of Christ’s suffering and dying was sufficient to save every individual who ever lived, but it was efficient only to the elect.

The Arminian thinker views the atonement as a great, wide bridge that spans the gulf between man and God, but it only goes halfway. Men must build the other half in order to reach the heavenly destination. However, the Calvinistic thinker asserts that the atonement is a narrow, sturdy bridge that reaches all the way across the expansive gulf between ruin and salvation. But, it is not popularly known and it is difficult to find.

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it (Matthew 7:13-14).

So, invariably we are forced to limit the atonement in either its effectiveness - the Arminian view - or in its particularity - the Calvinistic view. The Bible however defends the absolute completeness and utter efficaciousness of Christ’s death, while it also declares its specific application

and apprehension among the elect of God. Thus, the Arminian limitation lacks Scriptural support.

≈ OTHER ARGUMENTS

The most popular way to dispute the truth of Limited Atonement is with out-of-context verses that appear to refute it. But, when most of these “proof texts” are returned to their proper context, they not only fail to refute the doctrine, they actually support it!

1. Perhaps the most overused defense of universalism is, “God isn’t willing that any should perish!”

This phrase is drawn from 2 Peter 3:9. In context, Peter is dealing with those who scoff against the Gospel, asking, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” (2 Peter 3:4) But, Peter reminds them:

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some would count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

The key phrase here, as concerns God’s willingness that any not perish, is “to usward.” To whom is Peter writing? If we can establish that, we will know to whom he is referring when he says “to us-ward.”

1 Peter 1:2 identifies them as

... Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ ...

2 Peter 1:1 identifies them as

... them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ.

It is very important that we understand the contrast Peter has set up. There are some that ridicule the idea of Christ's return. He calls them "scorners, walking after their own lusts." He contrasts those people, who are impatient and unbelieving, with the recipients of God's grace, toward whom God is long-suffering. Peter refers to the believers as "us."

In context then, God is not willing that any of us should perish, and so none of us will. He is also willing that we would all come to repentance, and so we all will. He is holding back His glorious appearing and the wrath of His judgment until everyone of the elect are brought to repentance at their appointed time.

Also, the context of this chapter of Peter's epistle has nothing to do with eternal salvation. Peter is speaking of the eschatological end of the world here. In order to establish a theology concerning God's view of salvation, we need to refer to passages that are addressing that subject. This one is not.

Or, to take the opposite approach, if it is—as the misinterpreters of this verse would have us believe—God's will to save everyone, then His intention has been thwarted by the apparently superior will of individual humans who went to Hell despite the fact that Christ poured out His blood and went to His Father's side confident that He had secured their salvation. God's unwillingness that they should perish was of no value to them. They perished despite Him. Such a theology advocates a powerless, miserable God who constantly sees His beloved people perish, but is helpless to do anything about it. And that is not the God of the Bible.

For a more in-depth study of 2 Peter 3:9, please visit the Q&A section of our website (<http://www.salvationbygrace.org>).

2. John 3:16:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

This is a favorite verse of Arminian theologians who support the "universality" of Christ's mission. The key to their argument is the term "world," which they suppose implies that God's redeeming love extends to every person who ever lived, without exception. Hence, the work of the cross applies equally to every inhabitant of Earth, offering the opportu-

nity to believe and inherit the reward of everlasting life. But, is that really what this verse says?

The Greek word translated *world* is *kosmos* from which we get *cosmopolitan* or worldly. It does occasionally mean *the sum total of everything on the planet or in the universe*. However, it frequently denotes *men of every kindred, tribe, tongue and nation* as opposed to the Israelites exclusively. We must be able to differentiate these two uses of *kosmos* or we will end up confused.

The first converts to Christianity were Jews. Christ instructed His disciples to go first to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 10:6). So, it was against their natural sensibility to accept that Christianity would spread to the Gentile world. John, in response, recorded Christ’s declaration that God loved individuals from every ethnicity and gave His Son for them. Hence, God so loved “the world.”

Or, to view this another way, if we accept the Arminian interpretation of the word “world” as meaning *everyone who ever lived*, then we have a severe contradiction by the very same Apostle John when he writes:

Love not the world (kosmos), neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him (1 John 2:15).

Does John mean to tell us that God has commanded His children not to love the very same world that He Himself loved and gave His Son for? No, the only way to harmonize these verses is to recognize the specific applications of the word *kosmos*. God did love individuals from every part of the world, not just Israelites. But, we are not to love every part and facet of the world, or its temptations, or every individual in it.

Let’s approach this one more way --

Was Esau in the world? *Yes*.

Did God love Him? *No, God hated him.*

I have loved you, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob’s brother? saith the LORD: yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness (Malachi 1:2-3).

As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated
(Romans 9:13).

Or, what about the Pharisees? Were they in the world? *Yes*.
Did Christ love them and give Himself for them? *Not exactly ...*

“Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the
damnation of hell?” (Matthew 23:33)

“Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye
will do: He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not
in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh
a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father
of it...He that is of God heareth God’s words: ye therefore hear
them not, because ye are not of God” (John 8:44-47).

Certainly these scribes and Pharisees must be in the all-inclusive
Arminian “world.” But, are we to believe that God loved the children of
the devil, who could not escape the fires of Hell, so much that He sent
His Son for them, all the while knowing that they would perish? Not if
we are going to remain Scripturally consistent.

And, to drive home the point, if God loved the world so much, why
did Christ refuse to pray for them?

“I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which
thou hast given me; for they are thine” (John 17:9).

For a more in-depth study of John 3:16, please visit the Q&A section
of our website (<http://www.salvationbygrace.org>).

3. 1 Timothy 2:3-6:

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour;
Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the
knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator
between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave
himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

Arminian theologians pounce on this passage for two reasons. The first is the phrase “who will have all men to be saved.” And, the second is “Who gave himself a ransom for all.” But, both of these verses can be understood when they are viewed in light of the larger context.

This passage is from the Apostle Paul. Paul’s ministry was specifically to the Gentiles. In fact, the very next verse in his letter to Timothy points this out:

Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not;), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity.

Paul was defending his apostleship. He insisted that he was speaking “the truth in Christ.” His entire ministry was fraught with Jewish believers who refused to accept that the Gospel had spread to the Gentile world. Even Peter struggled with that idea (Acts 10). But Paul declared that his ministry, preaching and teaching, was specifically to the Gentiles. Why? Because Jesus did not make Himself merely a Jewish ransom, but a “ransom for all.” And God did not intend to save only Jews, but “all men.” Not all men who ever lived, but all kinds of men. The Greek word *pas*, translated *all* frequently has that exact meaning, *all kinds or all types*.

Now, in light of the verses we have already viewed proving that God will eternally condemn some people it is impossible to understand this passage from 1 Timothy 2 as saying that God positively determined to ransom and save each and every individual who ever lived. But, if we view Paul’s writing in light of the First Century Jewish church perspective, it is easy to see what he was driving at.

For a more in-depth study of 1 Timothy 2:4, please visit the Q&A section of our website (<http://www.salvationbygrace.org>).

4. “Whosoever will...”

In Scripture we find the Gospel offered freely to every listener who may pay attention. “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” (Matthew 11:15) And, the phrase “whosoever will” carries a strong implication that the decision-making ability of any individual is the deciding factor in the effectiveness of the Word. Arminian theologians point to two particular New Testament verses –

And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, “Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mark 8:34).

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come, And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely (Revelation 22:17).

Let me say at the outset that Calvinistic thinkers do not in any way restrict the free course of the Gospel message. We agree wholeheartedly that anyone who casts himself upon Christ and faithfully trusts in the finished atoning work will be saved. However, it is also obvious that not every man will avail himself of this free gift. So, while “whosoever will” may partake of the grace of God, not every person will. Only the elect will.

But, a bit of exegesis would help here. In the Greek language there is no word equivalent to the English word *whosoever*. When we read the word *whosoever* in the Bible, it is the translation of two Greek words, *pas ho*. The literal translation of those two words is, *all the*. It denotes a specific group of people, such as “all the believing.” So, the connotation presented by the contemporary version of the English term that God has left the door of salvation wide open to everyone who will exercise their will simply does not exist in the original Greek language.

But again, this realization does not in any way hamper the Calvinist’s zeal to preach the gospel of grace to anyone and everyone. I once heard a preacher say that it would be much easier if God had stamped the elect with a neon sign or made their hair stick straight up, or some other sign that would make their election obvious. But, the sheep are scattered among the goats. So, it is the job of God’s pastors to preach the Gospel of free and sovereign grace to everyone who will listen. Those with God-given ears will hear and respond, making their election obvious.

The sound of the Gospel goes into the entire world, but only the elect will truly comprehend it. We have all had the experience of listening to a wonderful sermon and having our hearts stirred while another person, hearing the same words, appears completely unmoved. What was the difference between us? Were we simply smarter, more spiritual, or more

willing? No, the electing grace of God quickened the Word to our hearts. We are saved by His gracious gift; we are merely the undeserving recipients.

For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it? (1 Corinthians 4:7)

As for the verse from Revelation 22 (an overused verse when making “altar calls,” a concept completely foreign to Scripture), it is necessary to look at the total context.

This verse appears at the end of the book - the final events of this age and the dawning of the new age. The enemies have been vanquished. The great judgment has taken place. The devil, his angels, and the unbelievers have been cast into the Lake of Fire. The “New Jerusalem” has come down from Heaven. There is “no more curse” (Revelation 22:3) and no more night or darkness because God is the light and the saints begin to “reign forever and ever.” (Revelation 22:5)

So, when the Spirit and the Bride say “come” and they offer the water of life, to whom are they offering it? The whole world? The unbelievers? No, the offer is to those who are already saved and occupying the eternal glory. They, and only they, are told that “whosoever will” may take of the water and tree of life.

These four examples ought to make obvious how Arminian preachers, to support their unbiblical conclusions, manipulate out-of-context verses. They have begun with a conclusion and sought for verses to support what they would prefer to be true. But the Bible does not bend to the whim of the interpreter. Truth is only uncovered when we humbly bow before the revealed Word and allow it say what it actually says.

After all, if our theology is in conflict with a clear declaration from Scripture, one of us is wrong. And, one of us must change. We must form and reform our theology until every word of Holy Writ sits comfortably within the framework. The Word of an unchanging God is not likely to change for our sakes—so, we must.

≈ CONCLUSION

We are logically and Scripturally backed into a corner. Only one of the following two statements can be true, because they are mutually exclusive:

Christ paid the sin debt in full and actually redeemed, justified and perfected those people for whom He died.

or

Christ removed the burden of sin, making salvation possible, but He did not actually accomplish anyone's salvation. Individual men and women must activate this redemption by believing, choosing or by acts of the will.

If the first statement is correct, then Christ could not have died for every single person without exception. He must have died for the particular elect.

If the second statement is correct, then the volition of individual men is the deciding factor that establishes or activates Christ's atoning work.

The Bible declares that the first statement is true. This is made plain not only by the details, but it is also consistent with the grandest Christian concepts. For instance, we know that all things work toward the glory and honor of God. And, God has desired that all things culminate in the preeminence to His Son.

In whom [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in Heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell. And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in Heaven (Colossians 1:14-20).

Surely the death of God's own Son, which paid our redemption price, purchased us off the slave market of sin, justified us before God's righteous standard, and perfected forever those for whom He perished, should never be construed in such a way as to glorify stiff-necked, rebellious, God-hating, spiritually dead sinners. All things exist for the purpose of glorifying the Son and there is no hint anywhere in Scripture that He intends to share that absolute preeminence with anyone.

Now, once we have concluded that Particular Redemption is the accurate understanding of Scriptural soteriology (the study of salvation), the next logical question is, "Can a person resist this salvation if he chooses to?"

That is the central question we will consider in the Doctrine of *Irresistible Grace*.

1. Tacitus, Annals xv.44. Quoted by Barrett, C.K. *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents*. (San Francisco, Harper Book. 1987) Pg. 15-16.

2. Boettner, Loraine. *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*. (Phillipsburg, New Jersey. Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co. 1932). Pg. 160

CHAPTER FOUR
IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

Before the foundation of the world, God elected the individuals whom He would save out of the mass of ruined humanity. Jesus suffered the wrath of God and poured out His life's blood to redeem and purchase those elect individuals, satisfying the justice of God on their behalf. Nevertheless, no unclean thing will ever stand in the pure and holy presence of God. So, before these redeemed sinners can see the Glory of Heaven, they must undergo an essential change of character and nature. But, such a change requires an absolute miracle.

The regeneration of sinful men—creating them anew, giving them a new heart, changing their will and desires and bringing them to repentance—is at the heart of this doctrine. The question of whether men have the ability to refuse this gracious re-creation is the subject of the debate.

Some theologians prefer to use the term *Invincible Grace*, as it denotes the power of grace to conquer and never be conquered. The term *Irresistible Grace* expresses the unmerited kindness of God that a man is powerless to resist. However both terms convey the same essential concept—God is all-powerful, man is utterly powerless.

As we saw in chapter one, men are sinners. We inherited our sinful estate from our progenitor, Adam. Adam was originally created in God's image and likeness. His physical life was continuous, without sickness or degeneration. His spiritual life was personal communion with God. However, after He rebelled and fell into sin, his spiritual life was instantly reversed and God decreed him spiritually dead. He was separated from God, ashamed and afraid. Meanwhile, his physical body began decaying in sin until his ultimate physical death.

The iniquity of Adam was passed down to the entire human race, from generation to generation, by the bloodline of the fathers. Modern medicine has concluded that the father determines the blood type of a newborn baby. However, carried with that blood type comes the iniquity

of the fathers passed down to the children. But, when the angel of the Lord announced to Mary that she would soon be pregnant, she responded that her virginity prevented such an occurrence.

Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And, the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God (Luke 1:34-35).

Jesus did not participate in the sinful bloodline of the human race. His Father determined his blood type. It was the pure and precious blood of God, spotless and holy. When Christ poured out that precious blood, it was sufficient price, acceptable to God, to pardon the iniquities of the elect saints so as to free them from the debt of sin that required eternal damnation, making them heirs with Christ of the Heavenly promise (Romans 8:17).

Nevertheless, though Christ suffered the consequences and vanquished sin for His people, we still live terrestrial lives, born in human bodies, consumed by our sinful natures. So of necessity, our inward nature must be changed before we can enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

But, we humans have a serious problem. Christ taught that it is impossible for bad trees to grow good fruit (Matthew 7:16-20). Bad trees must be made good in order to bear good fruit. And that, to stress the point, requires a miracle. The Doctrine of Irresistible Grace deals with exactly that miracle – the inward change wrought by God’s gracious power among His people. This is not a change that the whole world undergoes. Rather, the same electing ordination that wrote our names in the Lamb’s Book of Life, also guaranteed that we would receive the Holy Spirit and begin the journey toward our Creator.

∞ THE TRINITY

The salvation of men and women is a work that engages all three members of the Holy Trinity.

- The Father elected some people before the world began.

- The Son purchased their redemption and satisfied the penalty that was demanded of them.
- The Holy Spirit draws those people to God, changing their hearts and minds, making them willing to trade the “yoke of bondage” that leads to certain destruction for “freedom in Christ,” which leads to eternal life.

Now, while it is absolutely true and essential that in His atoning work Christ pardoned, redeemed, and justified sinners, that is not the whole sum of the work. He also secured their inheritance and created the pathway for the Holy Spirit to take up residence in their lives.

Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you (John 16:7).

And, I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you (John 14:16-18).

Jesus stated several remarkable things, here. Notice first how he demonstrated the unity of purpose within the three persons of the Godhead.

- Jesus prayed to the Father to send the Holy Spirit.
- The character of that spirit is the same as Christ’s own character—“another” comforter.
- That Comforter will abide with them forever. But, the world—whom God did not elect and for whom Christ did not die—will not receive the Spirit of Truth.
- But, “ye” know Him. Why? Because the Holy Spirit dwells with the redeemed and shall be in them, as a permanent resident.
- Then Jesus iterated, “I will not leave you comfortless,” but “I will come to you.” The Holy Spirit and Christ are one even as the Father and the Son are one. Yet, each is an individual with specific tasks and characteristics.

It is also necessary to point out that Christ clearly considers Himself

to be the deciding factor in who will and will not receive the Holy Spirit. Just as He can determine that the world will not receive it, He must equally decide who will receive it. Just as we cannot receive a birthday gift that is never given to us, we cannot receive the gracious gift of the Holy Spirit unless God specifically gives it to us (1 Corinthians 4:7).

The word translated *Comforter* is the Greek term *parakletos*, which has been transliterated into the English language as *paraclete*, or *helper*. The Greek word is primarily an adjective that suggests the capability for giving aid. It was used in a court of justice to identify a legal assistant, an advocate, or a counsel for the defense. So the Holy Spirit, given to elect sinners, pleads their cause in the court of Heaven and walks alongside, to comfort them, in their earthly pilgrimage.

This indwelling by one third of the Godhead is the *beginning* of the miraculous process of change. The very power of God that raised Christ from the dead dwells inside previously dead sinners. And, just as He was resurrected to new life, the indwelt sinner is resurrected from spiritual death to eternal life. This brings both our natural and spiritual evolution full circle.

Adam was born *spiritually alive* and became instantly *dead* at the moment of His rebellion. In the exactly opposite way, the elect sinners are born *spiritually dead* and at the point of the Holy Spirit's infusion they instantly become spiritually alive.

Likewise, Adam was created physically perfect, but his sin began his physical decay and ultimate death. In the exactly opposite way, sinners are born into decaying bodies. From the moment we are born we begin to die. Sickness and disease plague us our whole lives right up until our ultimate physical demise. But, the same quickening Spirit of God that raised us from our spiritual deadness will also raise our mortal bodies, resurrecting us to physical perfection. The redeemed are given new bodies and eternal spiritual/physical life. Plus, to complete the cycle, the redeemed will have access to the "Tree of Life" just as it was originally available to Adam (Revelation 2:7; 22:2,14).

≈ EFFECTUAL CALLING

Working as the agent of God in our lives, the Holy Spirit beckons us to be reconciled to our Lord. But, it is not the desperate cry of a beggar. It is the

efficacious call of authority, based on an eternal plan, made sure by everlasting love. And when God calls, His people most certainly and willingly respond, drawn by His infinite power and unalterable decree.

...I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee (Jeremiah 31:3).

“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:44).

“To him [Christ] the porter openeth, and the sheep hear his voice; and He calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And, when He putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice” (John 10:3-4).

God is a personal God. He “calls out” His people by name. He wrote their names in the Lamb’s Book of Life. He has predetermined a time in each of their lives when they would recognize His voice and respond. In fact, the very name by which His assembly of believers is identified speaks to this same fact. The word *church*, sometimes rendered *assembly*, is the Greek word *ekklesia*. It is a combination of the Greek terms *ek*, or *out of*, and *klesis*, or *a calling*. The church is a gathering of individual people *called out*. They are the *out-called ones*.

Originally, the term *ekklesia* had to do with ancient Greek assemblies for speeches or political rallies. If a man wanted an audience he would go through the town crying out to the residents that they come hear him speak at a particular time and place. That was a general call, inviting every person to come be part of the assembly. In contrast, when Isaiah wrote of the Messiah, he (speaking for God) declared:

Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street (Isaiah 42:1-2).

God did not call the church body en masse. He called individuals, one at a time, to be part of the body of Christ. The call of God by the Holy Spirit is the call of the Chief Shepherd to His sheep. It is not a general cry in the streets, hoping that someone will respond. The personal nature and particularity of God's call is seen time and again throughout Scripture. For instance:

1. When God was walking in the garden, He called Adam by name. The first man who fell was the first man called (Genesis 3:8-9).
2. God called Samuel as a lad three times in the night and Eli perceived it was the Lord (1 Samuel 3:4-10).
3. Moses was an Egyptian prince who sided with his heritage, the Jews, and fled to the desert when God spoke to him out of a burning bush, calling him, "Moses, Moses" (Exodus 3:4).
4. After the Angel of the Lord wrestled with Jacob, He said "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed" (Genesis 32:28).
5. When God intercepted Saul of Tarsus, He said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (Acts 9:4).
6. When Jesus called dead Lazarus from the grave, He called "Lazarus, come forth" (John 11:43).

These men were in positions of ignorance, defiance, or complete disinterest when God called them. Yet, He called them by name as a shepherd calls his sheep or a father calls his children. They were not going to remain in the condition in which He found them. The call of God is with the intent of changing men and Almighty God will work his purpose.

When the Holy Spirit "indwells" a person, it is impossible for that person to remain unaffected. When the New Testament speaks of the power of the Spirit, it uses the Greek word *dunamis* from which we get the word *dynamite*. Light a stick of dynamite and sit on it. Now, refuse to be moved. You get the idea.

☞ REPENTANCE

The second activity of the Holy Spirit is to convict a man of his sinfulness before God and bring him to repentance.

And, [Jesus] said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:46-47).

The disciples were to preach two things accomplished by Christ's death and resurrection—both “in his name”— *repentance* and *remission of sins*. It is not a difficult task to convince men that remission of sins is a work of divine grace, which only God could accomplish. However, Christ included in His commission that repentance was also the result of His death and resurrection. Repentance then is equally a work of grace, which only God can render.

The word *repentance* simply means *to change 180 degrees, or to turn from, to*. We turn from ourselves and our natural inclinations to God. In essence, we take sides with God against ourselves. We recognize and declare that God is just and we stand rightly condemned were it not for His grace.

Natural men, however, see no need to repent or “turn from” their wicked lives. Blinded to their own sin and convinced of their own ego-centric capability, natural men refuse to change because they do not view themselves as particularly bad.

All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weigheth the spirits (Proverbs 16:2).

There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness (Proverbs 30:12).

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Still, the holy, righteous standard of God absolutely requires that a man turn from his self-seeking ways and “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” (Matthew 6:33) So, the crucial question is: can

a natural man exercise his own will and intellect, understand the holy decree to repent and take it upon himself to perform?

No. Scripture says that only God can cause a man to repent.

In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; (2 Timothy 2:25)

Or, despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? (Romans 2:4)

Now, repentance is often confused with *human sorrow*. But, sorrow over our misdeeds is not the same as genuinely turning from our wicked acts. Usually, people whose deeds are uncovered will demonstrate some remorse, sincere or otherwise. But, repentance requires a desire and commitment to genuine change. And, sometimes God purposely breaks our hearts and causes us to be sorrowful for our sins. But, that sorrow is not the same as repentance. Rather, such sorrow leads to repentance.

Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death (2 Corinthians 7:9-10).

This “turning from ... to” is the work of God in a man. It cannot be forced, preached, cajoled, or “fearfully inspired” into him. Just as it is folly to insist that an unregenerate man receive the Holy Spirit when it is not up to him, it is equally pointless to beat a natural man over the head, insisting that he must repent, when he sees nothing wrong with his life nor has the ability to turn from it.

Sure, I agree, he must. But, he cannot.

Only God can work that work.

∞ “YE MUST BE BORN FROM ABOVE”

In John 3, Jesus had a conversation with a Pharisee, a teacher of Israel, named Nicodemus. Jesus instructed him,

“... Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3)

Nicodemus responded that it is impossible for a man, once he is old, to return to his mother’s womb to be born a second time. But Jesus corrected him by saying that He was speaking of two separate births, though they are similar events.

“... Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again” (John 3:5-7).

Just as a bad tree cannot produce good fruit, flesh can only produce flesh. The fleshly union of a man and woman may produce a fleshly offspring. That is what Christ called being “born of water.” But, the fleshly child is born a guilty sinner, just as his parents were. Physical birth does not guarantee an entrance into Heaven. That requires a second birth—“and of the spirit.”

In fact, the Greek word translated *again* in the King James Version is *anōthen*, or *from above*. So, Christ was instructing Nicodemus that he must be born *from on high* or *from above*. Flesh cannot produce spiritual birth. Only the Spirit can produce the spiritual second birth.

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:12-13).

Certain people are given the ability to receive Jesus Christ and to believe on His name. They alone are given power to become “the sons

of God.” By the way, there is a popular misreading of John 1:12-13 that insists that the power to become “sons of God” is given as a response, or out of obligation, to those who choose to “receive him” or “believe on His name.” John makes certain to undermine such thinking when he points out that the new birth is not the result of any man’s blood, or heritage. And, it was not the result of any person’s fleshly attributes. No amount of good works or law keeping brought about the Divine birth. Nor was it accomplished by anyone’s force of will. No one ever decided to “get born again” or chose to receive the Spirit of new birth.

So, what’s left? What is the catalyst in this supremely gracious act? John answered, “but of God.” God alone activates salvation.

This new birth into the family and lineage of Christ can only occur if God produces it. Men have no capacity to create it, or decide it. Polluted blood, sinful flesh and the deceitful will of men cannot and will not seek the spiritual awakening. It is up to God who will receive this birth and the world, for all their fleshly efforts, can never produce it. Neither can any flesh, saved or unsaved, control the spirit’s movement.

“The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).

Just as the wind blows where it will, directed only by the hand of Almighty God, so the Holy Spirit goes where He desires and gives birth to those He chooses, who may hear the sound of His passing, but they never control His coming or going. Despite any apparent dichotomy, this new birth, this spiritual awakening, is an absolute requirement to gain entrance into Heaven. Nonetheless, it is administered by the Sovereign will and good pleasure of God, alone.

“For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom He will” (John 5:21).

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; (Titus 3:5)

When the Lord chose to draw a parallel between childbirth and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, it was not a random comparison. When a woman gives birth to a child, the child is without choice in the process. When the time comes to deliver, the child is not consulted. Babies do not choose to be born, they do not choose their time of birth, and they do not choose their parents. They are simply the result of the union of two people, who became one flesh (Matthew 19:5). When the man deposited his seed into the woman, it produced an entirely new human being.

These are earthly types of the spiritual birth. Christ labored on the cross to produce spiritual offspring (Acts 17:28). A man is “born again” without choice in the process. When the time comes to be born again, the man is not consulted. We do not choose our time, our place, our circumstances, or even our Father - God Himself. But, when the Heavenly Father deposits the seed of the Holy Spirit in us, we become one flesh with Christ, our new husband, and that union produces an entirely new man - the Christian!

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new (2 Corinthians 5:17).

≈ FAITH

The final necessary result of the Holy Spirit’s indwelling is that the “born from above” individual is gifted with the ability to believe on Christ, to trust God, and to follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit. This ability is called *faith*.

The English term *faith* is a translation of the Greek noun *pistis*. However, an interpretive problem arises from the fact that the English language does not include a verb form of *faith*. As a result, the Greek verb *pisteuo* is rendered *believe* in the Bible. *Pistis*, or *faith*, signifies a firm conviction based on hearing and is in reference to faith in God, Christ, or things that are spiritual in nature. However, our English word *believe* encompasses a wide variety of definitions. Simply acknowledging that something exists has become synonymous with *belief*. It is in that vein that people will admit that they *believe* in God, without necessarily embracing any doctrine about Him. Simply making a decision is often

called *belief*, as in, “I don’t believe I’ll have dessert.” Even questioning the credibility of an idea, or witnessing an astounding act, is tantamount to *belief*, as in, “Wow, that’s unbelievable”.

Worse, modern notions of *belief* have become fiercely guarded rights of personal discretion and individual choice. Whatever any person *believes*, regardless of how bizarre, is considered as valid as anyone else’s *belief*. After all, that’s what they believe!

The Bible does not allow for that wide range of definition. Both *faith* and *believing* come from the same root—*pistis* and *pisteuo*. This firm conviction—not only of God’s existence, but also of everything revealed in Scripture concerning His Son—is an absolute necessity in our relationship with God. As we noted earlier, without this faith it is impossible to please God.

Many people who decry Biblical Christianity take refuge in the declaration, “But, I believe in God.” James warns against the idea that simply “believing” in the existence of God is somehow sufficient to guarantee eternal safety.

Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble (James 2:19).

Genuine faith does more than just intellectually ascend to the notion that God must exist out there somewhere. Every demon in Hell is convinced of the very same thing, and it scares them senseless. *Pistis* requires much more. *Faith* trusts that our entire eternal disposition is determined by a gracious, loving God who sent His Son as our substitute. As a result, *faith* does not rest in any personal merit, good works or righteousness, but wholly leans on the finished work of the Righteous Redeemer. Faith trusts that God will provide both our defense and our perfection.

Or to put it another way, it is easy for us to look at a chair and make a determination as to whether that chair could safely support us. That is an intellectual assessment. But, it is not faith. Faith requires sitting in the chair, putting our body on what we have confidence in. Faith looks at every circumstance, no matter how difficult or impossible, and stands on the Word of God. Faith treats God’s every declaration as more “real” than the circumstances of life. Faith hangs our bodies on “thus sayeth the Lord.”

But, without the intervention of the Holy Ghost a man will never come to this type of conviction, trust and belief. Faith is, purely and completely, a gift of God's grace. It cannot be intellectually decided. It cannot be coerced. Men cannot be convinced or persuaded to choose it, utilize it, or put it into action. Faith in God only comes from God implanting it into a man.

“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:44).

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Our salvation is a work of grace—unmerited kindness—through the intermediary agency of faith, which is a gift of God and not any part of ourselves. We are not saved, nor do we receive faith, by works—including choosing, deciding, receiving, or making a commitment—or else we would have something to boast about concerning our own salvation. And, God will not share that glory with anyone.

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2).

Clearly, if Christ authored our faith, He is the beginning of it. If He finished our faith, He is the completion of it. That leaves very little room for us to add to it. By the way, when you read Hebrews 12:2 in the King James Translation, the word *our* was added by the translator. Some editions indicate that by putting the word in Italics. The Greek text actually says that *Christ is the author and finisher of faith*. Wherever we find faith in God, among any of the creatures of Heaven and Earth, Christ is the power behind it.

This concept was so clear and precise in Paul's mind that when he listed the gifts of the Holy Spirit, he included faith.

Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will (1 Corinthians 12:3-11).

As well, Christ is the ultimate example of faith. He was cut off from His father, enduring the wrath of God, of which He was completely undeserving.

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? (Matthew 27:46)

And yet, He trusted and believed that the very same God who smote Him would raise Him from the dead and restore Him to even greater glory.

And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost (Luke 23:46).

That is a remarkable example of genuine faith. The faith of Christ paved the way for the faith of His saints. And, just as he planted faith in us, He is the power that sustains our faith until the end. He is truly the author and finisher of faith.

∞ IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

So then the theological issue arises: Can a man, steeped in his sins and happy in his rebellion, resist this charitable act of grace and remain in his unregenerate state if he so pleases? Biblically, the answer is “no,” which is why the word *Irresistible* is utilized when refuting the Arminian doctrines.

In simplest terms, the most obvious proof of the fallacy of man’s ability to resist the Holy Ghost is the fact that if he could, he would! The fleshly mind is at enmity with God. And, a man would never choose something he blatantly hates! Given an option, no man would ever be saved, because no man would choose to follow the paths of righteousness. It is utterly against their nature. And, without the knowledge that their ways are in question, they will never decide to turn, repent, or seek God.

That is why, despite its popularity in modern Evangelicalism, it is pointless to tell a man, “Make Jesus your Lord and Savior.” It is an impossible decision. Besides which, we do not make Jesus the Lord. He is the Lord. We do not make Him our Savior. He makes us saved!

The current emphasis on “free will” and humanistic philosophy leads unregenerate men to erroneously conclude that they can change their mind and turn to God at any point they wish. But, Jesus condemned such deceit.

“He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And, this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:18-19).

Only by understanding God’s sovereign foreknowledge and predestination can we rectify Jesus condemning unbelievers without giving them the time to “listen and decide.” He knew that they would never

come to repentance; they would always hate the light and prefer their evil ways. They would never change because He would never change them.

On the other hand, the Bible declares that the elect of God, bought by Christ's vicarious death, will follow after Jesus, will respond to the call of God, and will be raised in newness of life by the power of Christ's resurrection.

“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37).

“But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers” (John 10:2-5).

∞ THE ARGUMENT OF “FREE WILL”

The most common disagreement with this doctrine always sounds something like this: “But, this doctrine you're presenting does damage to a man's free will!”

Well, good! It's about time someone did damage to the notion of man's free will. To start with, the term *free will* does not appear anywhere in the New Testament and is never used in Scripture in the context of 'how people get saved.' The word *free will* appears only in the Old Testament as a type of non-required offering. But, it is never used to conclude, infer or imply that men have freedom to choose their destinies. In fact, Jesus combated that notion when He said,

“And, which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest?” (Luke 12:25-26)

Certainly if a man cannot make himself taller, change his skin color, grow more hair, prevent his own aging or decide to have greater wisdom,

his will is far from “free.” In point of fact, the will of humans is tremendously limited. A man may will to fly under his own power, but his lack of ability prevents him. A man may will to be the King of England, but his lack of heritage prevents him. A man may will to be filthy rich, or to run a mile in 3 minutes, or to become invisible, or to visit Heaven for a weekend – but he is ultimately powerless to enact his will.

Theologically speaking, the only freedom of the will a man possesses by nature is the freedom to sin. Our wills are limited from any thoughts or desires which would be pleasing to God. Our wills are taken up with fulfilling our fleshly desires. But, to be good and obligate God to react savingly is beyond our willpower.

Meanwhile, the implication of the Arminian contention is that if men could exercise a completely free will, some men would choose to be obedient to God and be saved. But, let’s learn from example. Adam had the “free-est” will of any man who lived prior to Christ. Most importantly, he lived in a sinless environment, so his natural inclinations would be toward God. The only limitation God placed on Adam’s complete freedom of choice was that he could not touch the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

In a perfect environment, the perfect man, with only one restriction on his freedom of choice, chose to rebel. How, then, are we to suppose that men who are lost in sin and rebellion, surrounded by myriad temptations, living in a world of anger and hatred toward God, will exercise their “free will” and choose, against their character and the lusts of their heart, to give up everything and follow after God?

The Bible declares us to be born “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). How can dead men exercise their will? Could Lazarus will to get up from the grave? Could the lame man at Bethesda’s pool will to get up and walk? Could the leper will himself clean? No. They were completely incapable and their wills were utterly limited.

Or, let’s learn from a historic example—how much will power and freedom of choice did Saul of Tarsus exercise in his conversion to Christianity? He was one of the fiercest persecutors the early Christians had ever seen. He oversaw the stoning of Stephen and was largely responsible for the flight of believing Jews out of Jerusalem. He was riding to Damascus with letters from the high priest giving him the power to bind and deliver to Jerusalem any men or women who embraced this new reli-

gion. Suddenly, a light shone from heaven and he was knocked off his donkey. As he hit the ground, the voice of Jesus called to him, blinded him and later took him into the desert to train him. That man, known to us as the Apostle Paul, wrote two-thirds of the books found in the New Testament. And, nowhere in his writing did he ever take credit for his conversion. To the contrary, Paul is the New Testament's leading authority on grace and predestination.

When Jesus came upon Simon Peter and his brother Andrew casting their nets into the sea, He said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." And, "they straightway left their nets and followed him" (Mat.4:19-20). That is an effectual call. There is no mention in the text of Jesus asking them to decide, choose Him, or make Him Lord or Savior. Instead, they reacted to the overpowering command of the One who was Lord of the Universe. They were powerless to resist.

The next argument usually sounds something like this - "Well, then you're saying that God saves people despite themselves and drags them, kicking and screaming, into Heaven."

No, that is not the way it happens. God sovereignly changes a man's will and his heart, creating in him the desire to follow. God does not compete with a man's will; He overpowers it.

Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power ... (Psalm 110:3)

And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh: That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God (Ezekiel 11:19-20).

But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I

will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jeremiah 31:33-34).

For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13).

God does not act in opposition to a man's will. God changes a man's will, drawing them to Himself, altering their very heart and nature. Those elect, blood-bought, Spirit-indwelt saints come to Jesus most willingly. We decide against ourselves and submit ourselves to the will of our Father, just as Jesus submitted His desires to the will of His Father:

“... Father if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42).

The sacrifice of Christ freed men from the bondage of the law and “the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross” (Colossians 2:14). Without the “curse of the law” hanging over us, we are free to do whatever we desire. But, God's indwelling Spirit changes our desires! He makes us free to follow our urges, but He reshapes our urges! He makes us free to do as we please, but He changes our hearts so that our greatest pleasure is to be pleasing to Him.

All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any (1 Corinthians 6:12).

In the great and glorious freedom of Christianity, we are cleared of every offense and the Law that would condemn us is utterly taken out of the way. Yet, we are equally indwelt with the desire to do those things that bring glory to our God. We are not merely puppets, tugged into Heaven by some Almighty puppet master. We are the recipients, against our natures, of the gracious desire to follow and be obedient to our Savior. Again, everything having to do with our salvation will redound to the glory of Christ, and not ourselves. The arguments of free will, despite their attractiveness on the surface, appealing to our egos and natural ten-

dency to boast in our achievements, fail to find even the slightest hint of Biblical support.

≈ THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST

When Jesus walked the planet, He exercised authority over every facet of His creation:

- He changed the nature of animals when He rode on a donkey that had never been sat on, making it gentle and subservient (Luke 19:30-35).
- He changed the nature of fish when He caused them to jump into the nets (John 21:6).
- He changed the nature of water when He caused it to become wine (John 2).
- He changed the nature of storms when He caused them to cease with just a word (Matthew 8:25-26).
- He changed the nature of a budding fig tree when He caused it to wither and die by His word (Matthew 21:18-20).
- He would have changed the nature of stones and caused them to cry out, had the people been silenced (Luke 19:40).

There is no difference when Christ works in the hearts of men. When the Sovereign Lord speaks, His creation obeys Him. When He decrees that a man will be changed, that man is powerless to refuse. It is wholly incomprehensible that the God who spoke the universe into existence, who sits established on His throne in Heaven, who declares the end from the beginning and calls things which are not as though they were, has been handcuffed by the “will” of creatures whose lives are like vapors, who return to the dust and who cannot even draw a breath without the permission of the God they supposedly control.

To conclude that God would choose to save some men and Christ would bare the pain of separation from His Father for those men and then their ultimate fate would be left in their sinful, ignorant, rebellious hands is to call God both powerless and foolish. If God decrees the salvation of a man, that man will be saved. He will acknowledge his unrighteousness, and realize his need of a Savior. Like Jonah, He will conclude, “Salvation is of the Lord!” (Jonah 2:9).

That man will be re-created, in the image of God’s Son, seeking the will and pleasure of the Father. He will be reborn, trading in His filthy,

self-righteous rags and putting on the clean, pure robes of righteousness in Christ. He will believe on Christ's finished work and in the God who sent Him, knowing that they are his means of security and only hope of eternal life.

My hope for you all would be as Paul's was for the Church at Ephesus:

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened: that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at His own right hand, in the heavenly places (Ephesians 1:17-20).

May we indeed receive the spirit of wisdom, understand the revelation of the knowledge of Him, have our eyes opened and our understanding enlightened, and know what is the hope of His calling.

God calls. We respond by His grace. And, we are guaranteed an entrance to Heaven, based on His foreordained decree, His sovereign election, Christ's full atonement and the Holy Spirit's infilling. Those elements of salvation are so certain, so rigorous and so trustworthy that we cannot but find ourselves in the state of eternal life. And, that brings us to the last of the five Doctrines of Grace, the *Perseverance of the Saints*.

CHAPTER FIVE
PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

If we determine that each of the previous four doctrinal positions is theologically sound and Scripturally true, then the fifth is an inescapable conclusion:

1. If the doctrine of *Total Depravity* is true, then all mankind is naturally sinful, spiritually dead and incapable of doing anything to please God or obligate Him to save them. Thus, if anyone is to be saved, it must be God who acts on the behalf of sinners; as opposed to lifeless, helpless, sinful creatures raising themselves up to seek God.
2. If the doctrine of *Unconditional Election* is true, then God chose before the creation of the world a set number of otherwise lost creatures whom He would show mercy and grace according to His own purpose and pleasure. Given their sinful, corrupt estate, there would be nothing within any individual that God could consider as positive merit, so God's election would be without condition and without obligation.
3. If the doctrine of *Limited Atonement* is true, then Jesus Christ came to Earth and died as a substitute for God's elect people, fully satisfying the demands of the Law, paying our ransom and securing our eternal perfection. But, the sacrifice and resurrection to life was efficacious solely to those individuals God chose and ordained to eternal life. The sinful world neither embraces Christ in faith nor shares in the benefits of His atoning work.
4. If the doctrine of *Irresistible Grace* is true, then God's elect people are all indwelt by the Holy Spirit, drawing them to the Father and bringing them to faith in the Son. The power of God which spoke light into the universe equally speaks light into the soul of darkened sinners, bringing them to the new birth, the awakening of their spiritual senses and the promise of eternal life. This power

of God to overwhelm His creatures cannot be defeated, ignored or resisted. Jesus will positively and definitely save every last person God chose.

All that being true, it is both logical and intellectually inescapable to conclude that every person God absolutely and unconditionally purposed to eternal life will indeed wind up eternally safe and secure in the Father's presence. A God who is all-powerful will definitely see His plan and purpose fully completed. And, inasmuch as nothing within a man caused or obligated God to save him, then just as equally nothing within that person can cause God to release him, or turn him over to the forces of destruction. Just as it takes a powerful, miraculous act of God to regenerate a sinner, it would take an equally powerful, miraculous act of God to degenerate a believer back to his former state.

This concluding doctrine is therefore called "The Perseverance of the Saints." This position declares that every single one of God's chosen people will certainly and definitely make it all the way to their predestined reward. They will persevere despite time, obstacles, enemies and the "sin that doth so easily beset us" (Hebrews 12:1).

The debate centers on the Arminian assumption that true believers may "fall away" and lose their salvation. A natural extension of that assumption is the idea that a person may be saved and lost several times over the course of his or her life. The Arminian position continues to place responsibility for any person's ultimate destination squarely in the hands of incapable rebels. Rather than emphasize the sovereignty of God in every aspect of salvation - particularly the security of all believers during their earthly sojourn - the Arminian position places undue and indefensible emphasis on the will power of the sinful human not only to "get saved" but also to remain in a saved condition.

But as stated earlier, if the salvation of humans is God's enterprise, based on nothing more or less than the grace, mercy and good pleasure of the One who decrees all things from the beginning, then it would take more than just a change of character or activity on the part of the human in order for God to leave him to his own devices and let him perish. It would take a change of mind, a change of decree, and a change of eternal determination on the part of an unchanging God.

∞ THE CERTAINTY OF GOD'S DECREES

Theologians use the word *immutable* when describing the attributes of God. It means that God is incapable of change. He does not change His mind, His direction, His decree or His intentions.

For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed (Malachi 3:6).

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

God is not a man, that he should lie, neither the son of man, that he should repent; hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or, hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? (Numbers 23:19)

It is the essential character and nature of God, one of His intrinsic attributes, that what He purposed in the beginning was of such perfection that it never needed to be altered or improved upon.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning (James 1:17).

When John introduces the person of Jesus at the very beginning of his gospel, He refers to Him as *the Word*, from the Greek *logos*. It is a unique name given to the Son of God, designating Him as the “speaking” agency of the Godhead through whom all things which ever were created were “spoken” into existence. The word “Logos” appears repeatedly in the New Testament, making reference to the Scripture as the written word of God and to Jesus as the living word of God.

When God sent His Son into the world to accomplish the specific task of salvation for the elect, there was never any question in the councils of Heaven that the task would be completed. It was decreed and empowered by the immutability of an Almighty God. And, Jesus would not return to His father without accomplishing the very thing He was sent to do.

So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it (Isaiah 55:11).

Whether we are considering the spoken word of God, the written word of God or the incarnate Word of God, it is given for a purpose and cannot fail in its purpose. Knowing this, was there ever any possibility that God would not raise His Son from the grave? Would God—*could* God—have failed to resurrect Jesus? The Psalmist prophesied the impossibility of such a notion.

For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption (Psalm 16:10).

God would definitely resurrect His Son's physical body. Likewise, there is not even the remotest possibility that God will fail to resurrect the "Body of Christ" on earth. Jesus and Paul were emphatic on this point. Eternal life is given specifically and invincibly to all those for whom Christ died.

These words spake Jesus and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him (John 17:1).

But, God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life (Romans 5:8-10).

God's reputation and faithfulness are at stake. Would God promise His Son a people and then fail to give them to Him? Would He betroth His Son a wife and then fail to see the marriage consummated?

And, the validity of Christ's own promises is at risk. Would Jesus promise life to those who believed on Him and then fail to complete the transaction? Surely not.

≈ THE DURATION OF SALVATION

Christ actually accomplished the salvation of His people on the cross. But what sort of salvation was it? How long will it last? Will it endure? Or is there any chance that it may come up short?

One of the primary concepts of the Bible, an absolute fundamental, is the concept of "everlasting life."

And, this is the promise that He hath promised us, even eternal life (1 John 2:25).

And, for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance (Hebrews 9:15).

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me hath everlasting life" (John 6:47).

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24).

Jesus also spoke repeatedly of *eternal life*:

"Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal" (Matthew 25:45-46).

That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only

begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:15-16).

Then said Jesus unto the twelve, “Will ye also go away?” Then Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:67-68).

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:27-28).

These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:1-3).

When we consider words like “everlasting” and “eternal” we must view them from God’s perspective. God does not live in time, neither is He restricted by it. Time was God’s invention and time is under the dominion of the Creator. Acting outside of and above time, God determined that the salvation of His elect people would be accomplished in the death of His Son—the Lamb slain. And, that sacrificial act was determined before the foundation of the world.

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God (1 Peter 1:18-21).

And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him [the beast], whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8).

Eternal God formed an eternal decree that would result in eternal salvation for those He has eternally loved. By their very nature, the decrees of God reach not only forward into the eons of eternity future, they equally span backward into the depths of eternity past. Thus, the consequences of Christ's vicarious atonement are eternal life and eternal salvation, determined in eternity past and guaranteed into eternity future.

I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever; nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him. That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past (Ecclesiastes 3:14-15).

An elect believer is as secure in his salvation at any point in this terrestrial life as he will ever be in Heaven. In reality, his salvation was secured long before his own conversion. God, who purposed his eventual conversion, controls the circumstances of his life and regulates each breath and heartbeat. In His own time, according to His own good pleasure, God reveals Himself to the elect person. But, God's immutable decree of a heavenly destination for that man was secured before the man was ever conceived.

Eternal security does not start with an act of the will, a profession of faith, baptism or confession. It began in the mind of God, prior to the formation of Adam. The events of a believer's life simply bring him to the realization of this fact.

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).

What little security the Arminian contingency is willing to admit usually begins at the point of conversion and lasts forward into the future.

But, that is “partial” or “temporal” salvation—not eternal salvation. A salvation that can be lost is not genuinely “eternal.”

Again, our security does not rest in the power of our will, our flesh, or our desire. Our security is firmly grounded in the immutable decrees of God.

∞ TO THE FINAL ONE

So, if God determined that the salvation secured in Christ is sure and eternal, how many of the elect whom God purposed to save will actually be saved?

All of them.

Jesus will not lose a single sheep for which He shed His blood.

“For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost. How think ye? If a man have a hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And, if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish” (Matthew 18:11-14).

The power of God to rule His kingdom is the surety that Jesus will sustain the faith of His chosen. To suggest that Christ will not bring every last redeemed saint into glory is to suggest that God Himself may be toppled from His throne. If one person whom God elected fails to inherit the Heavenly promise, Christ’s own declaration “Behold, I and the children which God hath given me” (Hebrews 2:13) would return to His Father in vain. But, the will of the Sovereign is rigorous and certain. It will be carried out, because no one can overthrow His decree.

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And, I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man

is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one" (John 10:27-30).

"And, this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day" (John 6:39).

In Gethsemane, Jesus prayed that His father would continue to look after His chosen while He went out of the earth:

"While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition [Judas]; that the scripture might be fulfilled" (John 17:12).

These verses unquestionably lead us to conclude that Jesus intends to bring each and every elect believer safely into Glory. Are we able to imagine the will of the Father and the clear intention of the Son being eternally frustrated by "the one that got away"? Can a single person, full of ego, stubborn in his self-will, exercise enough authority to destroy such everlasting decrees in the councils of Heaven?

God forbid.

≈ THE SEED OF THE SERPENT

And the LORD God said unto the serpent, "Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel"
(Genesis 3:14-15).

The single, blessed Seed of God who crushed the head of Satan is none other than Jesus Christ. But, from the moment of that declaration, God divided all humanity into two groups:

- 1) The blessed lineage: the seed of the woman.

2) The cursed line: the seed of the serpent.

Elect believers, destined for Heaven, are obviously of the blessed line. The balance of reprobate humanity is obviously the cursed line. There is no “gray area” and no ground in between. Now here’s the point: for a man to lose his eternal inheritance he must trade his status within the blessed lineage to become a son of the Devil. This is more than just an intellectual “change of mind.” For a saved person to be lost requires a complete alteration in his eternal character and destiny. But, the Bible states the impossibility of such a concept.

Once the Holy Spirit of God takes up residence in a man or woman, they are effectively secured against any invasion from devils, or even Satan himself.

We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not (1 John 5:18).

When the Pharisees confronted Jesus and accused him of driving out demons by the power of Beelzebub, He stated that two strong men could not inhabit the same house. When the Holy Spirit enters into a man who was formerly controlled by Satan, the Spirit binds the devil and casts him out. Once the superior might of the Holy Spirit takes up residence in the house, it can never again be spoiled.

“Or else, how can one enter into a strong man’s house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house” (Matthew 12:29).

“But, if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you. When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: But, when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils” (Luke 11:20-22).

Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that in you, than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4).

So, knowing that the devil is powerless to defend any stronghold against the superior might of our Lord and cannot touch anyone that is purchased of Christ, how is it possible for a man to be so tempted that he would willingly exchange his heavenly estate for the certain doom of hell? According to Paul, the trials of this life cannot destroy the bond of love and salvation which we have in Christ.

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Even false prophets and Antichrist himself are unable to influence the minds of those around whom God has built His hedge of protection (Job 1:10).

“For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matthew 24:24).

But, it is not possible. The elect are eternally secure from the powers of Satan that seek to pull us away from God’s protective hand. In fact, Paul gives us a very complete list of the myriad influences that will try unsuccessfully to pry us from our salvation.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35, 38-39).

The term “any other creature” includes men. It even includes the single man who would attempt to take responsibility for his own

salvation, or loss of it. We are not secure because we are flawless and faithful. But, we are secure because God is flawless and faithful.

If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:13).

∞ THE ARGUMENTS

The most common disagreement with this doctrine stems as much from experience as from particular Scripture. The church has always been fraught with “apparent” believers who give outward indications of actual conversion, but who later “fall away” and lose interest in the things of God. To the onlooker, this appears to be the loss of salvation. But, Jesus warned of such people.

In His parable of the sower, Jesus tells us that the seed, His word, goes out into different types of soil:

And, these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts. And, these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness, and have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word’s sake, immediately they are offended. And, these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word. And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful. And, these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred (Mark 4:15-20).

Those people whom Christ refers to as “stony ground” receive the gospel gladly and spring up quickly, giving every indication that they are indeed good ground. But, only after they are offended and turn away do we get insight into their true nature. That departure is proof that they were never part of the elect church to begin with.

They went out from us, but they were not of us: for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us (1 John 2:19).

The departure of such people from the faith of Christ is not proof that a man can lose his salvation; it is proof that even the most genuine efforts of the flesh cannot produce a true and lasting faith. Outward appearances can be deceiving. The devil himself can give the outward impression of being a believer.

And, no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works (2 Corinthians 11:14-15).

But eventually the truth is always revealed and we should be thankful that God purges the body of the church and drives out the deceitful elements.

But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit, again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire (2 Peter 2:22).

This passage in 2 Peter 2:22 is often used by Arminian debaters to argue that a person can lose their salvation and return to their former state, just as dogs return to their vomit and pigs return to the mud. But, notice that Peter's reference to animals returning to their intrinsic habits says nothing of "sheep." Converts to Christ are called sheep because they follow their shepherd. Peter did not argue that sheep suddenly become swine or dogs. The reason the dogs and swine return to their old ways is because they are, in fact, dogs and swine. They are not sheep. They are not following the shepherd. They are not part of His flock. Pigs will always be pigs, even if you scrub them awhile. Dogs will always be dogs, even if they are in the midst of sheep. But, their true nature will surface and they will return to their old ways.

On the other hand, the supposition that a man can lose his salvation creates its own theological dilemmas. For instance, why, if God is all knowing, would He allow a man who was once “saved” to live long enough to turn his back and destroy his own security? Would it not be more just and fair for God to kill such a man while he was in a state of belief rather than allowing him to remain on earth long enough to “fall away”? Should God’s all-knowing providence not have acted to save that man while it was possible?

Or, since Hebrews 10:14 teaches that by Christ’s one sacrifice He “perfected forever them that are sanctified,” how can a “perfected forever” man choose to return to imperfection, considering that it was not his own will or power that perfected him in the first place?

Or, does he simply go to hell perfect?

☞ WHAT ABOUT FALLING FROM GRACE?

Another popular out-of-context argument arises when people misrepresent the Scripture as saying that a man may “fall from grace.” Their argument implies that a man may lose his salvation because he has somehow slipped out of God’s preserving kindness. But once again proper context will dispel their errant thinking. The phrase “fallen from grace” occurs only once in Scripture:

Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace (Galatians 5:4).

In context, it is fairly difficult to misconstrue Paul’s meaning. Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles. He constantly defended the New Testament doctrine of salvation by grace alone against “Judaizers” who insisted that Christians were obligated to keep the Law of Moses. In refuting such teaching, Paul insisted that anyone relying on his own fleshly abilities to save himself had “fallen from” or “passed out from under the security of” gracious salvation. The sure and certain work of Christ is of no effect to men who insist on law keeping as a means of justification before God.

This verse is clearly a contrast between the requirements of the old and new covenants. It is not the basis of any doctrine promoting the arbitrary loss of salvation.

∞ “WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION”

Another popular disagreement sounds like this: “Doesn’t the Bible say that we are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling?” The implication of this argument is that Paul admonished believers to take an active role in securing Heaven by working it out for themselves. Let’s put this one in its context, too.

Paul wrote this to believers—the church at Philippi. He had already taught them the doctrine of Sovereign Grace. In fact, Paul opens his letter to the Philippians with this greeting:

Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:2-6).

Paul credited God with beginning the good work of bringing these believers into the fellowship of the gospel and he reaffirmed his confidence that God will continue and complete what He alone began. Paul, however, was called to be a missionary. As such, he never stayed in one area for a prolonged period. And, his epistle to Philippi was written after he had departed.

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12).

Now being absent, Paul leaves the Corinthian believers to administer the work of Christ without him. He pointed out, however, that it is nothing to be trifled with. They are to approach the task with *fear*—the Greek *phobos*, from which we derive the word *phobia*, and *trembling*—the Greek *tromos*, from which we get the word *trauma*.

But, to finally refute any misinterpretation of Philippians 2:12 that insists that Paul was instructing us to take responsibility to secure our own salvation, we need only read the verse which follows it:

For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13).

Paul's knowledge of God's sovereign care over the church at Philippi gave him the confidence to leave them in God's hands. Certainly, if Paul insists that it is God Himself who causes us to turn our attention to Him and conduct ourselves according to His good pleasure, he is not contending that we are the deciding factor in our salvation. Any interpretation of these verses that comes to such a conclusion has missed Paul's meaning completely.

≈ BUT WHAT ABOUT BACKSLIDERS?

Despite the popular use of the word “backsliding” in modern Christian parlance, the word never appears in the New Testament. None of its forms—backslide, backslider, backslidden—is ever applied to a Christian. Not once. Backsliding is used only in the Old Testament as a description of national Israel as they failed to follow the commands and leadership of God. Christians are either utterly sold-out to their Master, following their Shepherd and obeying their King, or they are not Christians. There is no such language in the Bible as “backslidden Christian” or “carnal Christian.” There are only sinners saved by grace. The notion of backslidden or carnal Christians enters our Christian lexicon as a logical consequence of Arminian thinking. It starts with the assumption that all a person needs to do to secure their eternity with God is make a simple profession of faith or say “the sinner’s prayer.” Having said those words or followed that method, these new converts are often assured that they are now saved and nothing can change their destiny. This is classic “once saved always saved” theology—as opposed to the Biblical doctrine of Eternal Security. “Once saved always saved” theology places responsibility for salvation on the sinner’s profession, whereas Biblical eternal security places responsibility for salvation completely at the feet of the sovereign Lord.

The problem arises when these converts to “easy believe-ism” fail to truly repent, change or live the Christian life. How are they to be classified? Are they no longer Christians? According to the Arminian, their failure to produce any fruit of actual conversion does not undermine their genuine salvation. They are simply “backslidden” or “carnal Christians.” But again, the Bible does not allow for such sub-categories

among the redeemed. Either a person is saved fully and efficiently by Christ's atonement or he is not. And, those that are saved will assuredly produce the fruits of repentance and righteousness.

Now, I am not contending that all Christians—or indeed any Christians—ever achieve perfection or personal righteousness. I am saying that the bent of their lives will be redirected away from their own sinful, fleshly desires toward the desire to please their Master. Genuine conversion begins the process of change. It does not happen instantaneously. Along the path sheep stray, sinners sin, and imperfect people stumble. But, we are not kept secure by our own ability to attain perfection:

And, the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen (2 Timothy 4:18).

Though we stumble, we are kept from destruction by God's unfailing grace.

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen (Jude 24-25).

The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD; and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand. I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. He is ever merciful, and lendeth; and his seed is blessed (Psalm 37:23-26).

Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away. Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness (Isaiah 41:9).

While it is certainly true that Christians fail, we are not preserved by our ability to keep Christ, we are preserved by Christ's ability to keep us. His merciful long-suffering will never betray us.

A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory (Matthew 12:20).

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee (Hebrews 13:5).

We will always fall short so long as we are living in these tabernacles of human flesh with the cancer of sin coursing through our veins. That is why the promise of eternal life is also the promise of a new perfect body to wear in our new perfect home.

And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).

∞ THE EXAMPLE OF PETER

Of all the apostles Christ chose, we get the most complete "personality profile" of Peter. The portrait we get is of constant peaks and valleys, faith and failure. But, interwoven like a golden thread through Peter's life we find constant support, forgiveness and preservation on Christ's part.

For instance, Peter was the only disciple who Christ ever called "Satan" to his face, because he could not discern the spiritual significance of Christ's necessary death (Matthew 16:23). But, was Peter's lack of understanding his undoing? No. Jesus later told him, "Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not" (Luke 22:31). Left to himself, Peter would have continued in his ignorance and rebellion. But, Christ shored up his faith, prayed for him and secured him.

Peter was also the only apostle who walked on the stormy sea to get to Jesus. What a moment of miraculous victory! But on the way he was

filled with fear and doubt and began to sink. Jesus called him “ye of little faith.” Did Peter’s lack of faith cause his eternal destruction? No. As soon as Peter cried out “Lord save me!” immediately Christ put out his hand and brought him out of the tempest (Matthew 14:31). Peter failed, but Christ prevailed.

On the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter misunderstood Christ’s Lordship over the Old Testament leaders, Moses and Elijah, the embodiment of “the law and the prophets.” Peter wanted to erect three tabernacles to worship them equally. But, God corrected Peter from Heaven, saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him” (Matthew 17:5). Left to his own understanding, Peter would never have realized the superiority of Christ and the New Covenant of salvation by grace through faith. But, Peter was not left to lean on his own understanding. He was directed and instructed by God. Peter’s theological shortcomings may have led to his final failure. But, God is faithful.

At the Last Supper, Peter said that even if all men were offended because of Christ, he would never be. Jesus predicted that Peter would deny Him three times that very night. Later, as Christ prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, He asked Peter repeatedly to remain awake and pray with Him, but Peter fell asleep. Later that night, as the trial proceeded, Peter fulfilled that prophecy, denying his Lord and weeping bitterly at his failure. Peter’s third denial of Christ should have sealed his fate eternally. His failure to persevere in faith might well have led to his damnation. But, after He was resurrected, Jesus came to Peter personally and asked him three times “Do you love me?” With each affirmative answer Christ responded, “Feed my sheep” (John 21:15-17). Peter stumbled, cursed, denied and fled. Christ lifted him up, restored him and brought him back into the fold, guaranteeing the destiny Christ prepared for him. Fifty days later, at Pentecost, Christ chose Peter to preach the sermon that brought the New Testament church into existence (Acts 1).

If the Arminian version of security is true, then Peter lost and regained his salvation many times in his life. But, in every example of his failure and rejection of Christ, we find Jesus being the soul agent of reconciliation, drawing Peter back to Himself and preserving Peter’s faith. Peter’s decisions served only to condemn him, never to regenerate him. Christ’s decisions served always to save Peter, never to condemn him. That is the security we have in our Lord. Our sins have been paid for. Our

failures have been accounted for. And, the faithfulness of the One who loved us with an everlasting love serves to secure us despite ourselves.

∞ ROMANS 8:29-30

This brings us full circle. The purpose and plan of God as spelled out by Paul in Romans 8 find their completion in this doctrine:

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called. And, whom he called, them he also justified. And, whom he justified, them he also glorified.

- God's loving-kindness predestined certain individuals to be the brethren of Christ in eternity, of whom Jesus was the firstborn, giving Him all the rights of inheritance. That's Unconditional Election performed among Totally Depraved humans.
- Those predestined individuals were efficaciously called. That's Irresistible Grace.
- Those same people in particular were justified by Christ's atonement. That's Limited Atonement.
- Those same justified, elect people are already glorified in the sight of God. That's Perseverance of the Saints.

In God's estimation we are securely seated in Heavenly places along with our Elder Brother, our Lord and Savior, the Head of the Body, the Rock of our Foundation, our Bridegroom and Husband, the Lover of our souls, our Passover Lamb, our Substitute and Deliverer, our Friend and Comforter, our Redeemer, our Advocate with the Father, the Author and Finisher of our Faith, the Eternal Logos, the only Begotten of the Father, the Firstfruit of the Resurrection, the Bread of Life, the Living Water, the All and In All—Jesus Christ.

Amen.

∞ THE VALUE OF THE REDEEMED

The Doctrines of Grace teach us that men are miserable sinners after the flesh. They are wholly without value or goodness, in and of themselves. But, when the grace of God is applied to men, they are re-made, re-formed and made anew into something too marvelous for words. They are recreated into the image of His beloved Son.

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2).

That gracious transformation is the inevitable result of election. Scripture does not say that the redeemed, elect sinners will remain unsightly, repugnant creatures in God's Holy presence. Rather, God forms them into precious treasures:

And, from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen (Revelation 1:5).

And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth (Revelation 5:10).

The saints of God will have authority to rule and reign with the King of kings.

Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? (1 Corinthians 6:2-3)

Not only that, but He will make us a thing of beauty. In Isaiah 61:3

God says that Christ will give His people “beauty for ashes.” He will trade the “oil of joy for mourning and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” One day this old earth will be folded up like Christ’s burial napkin and we will be changed to a state of glory that we can hardly imagine.

But, God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:4-6).

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Romans 8:18).

Consider this: the Father gave the elect people to the Son as a gift. Surely, God would not give His Son a worthless, ugly gift. The Church is also referred to as “the Bride of Christ,” chaste and pure. Jesus would not marry and become one flesh with something worthless and filthy.

For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2).

Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And, to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And, he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb ... (Revelation 19:7-9)

And, the Son will present those same people back to the Father. They appear to be quite valuable. My point is this: there is a great transforma-

tion coming. The promise of redemption is more than simply the forgiveness of sin, as wonderful as that is. The total redemption of every elect human, body, soul and spirit, is the end result of Christ's atoning work.

The value of any item is determined by the price paid for it; the higher the price, the more valuable the object. No greater price has ever been paid, in Heaven or earth, than the price of God's own blood spilled to purchase the elect. But clearly, that great sacrificial price was not paid because of any intrinsic value in the saved ones. Rather, they are to be re-created into "vessels of honor."

Dead, worthless, rebellious God-haters are made into trophies of grace - white robed and washed pure by the blood of Christ - to sit through the countless ages of eternity as testimony to the value of the Son's atonement and the Father's sovereign mercy. The very faithfulness of God remains the surety of every elect sinner's eternal destination.

God will accomplish His intention in raising up a peculiar people.

God will provide His son a wife.

God will have a people who will worship and praise Him eternally "in spirit and in truth."

The mystery of God's grace is beyond human reason or comprehension. But, what we do know is that God has a divine purpose to everything He does. And, we are the recipients of holy love and unmerited kindness for God's own purpose and glory.

He will make us perfect. He will make us beautiful. He will make us eternal. He will make us holy. He will make us pure. He will make us incorruptible.

He will make us like Christ.

And, God will do all these things in such a way that He, Himself, gets all the glory, all the honor, all the praise and all the worship.

For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But, God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And, base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are: That no flesh should glory in His presence. But,

of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption; That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord (1 Corinthians 1:26-31).

That's sovereign.

That's grace.

That's salvation by grace alone.

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