

Unlocking Grace

A Study Guide in the Doctrines of Grace

by

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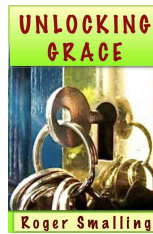


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Preface

Has it ever struck you as peculiar how God occasionally does things in roundabout ways?

Take the definition of *grace* for example. Since we are saved by grace, it would seem proper for God to define it at the beginning of the Bible. He could have inspired a prophet to write a dictionary definition starting with something like, ...*grace is defined as...*etc. This would be to the point, just as we moderns like it.

That is not what we find, though, is it?

Instead, we encounter a series of stories about imperfect people whom God liked for little apparent reason. This helps moderately, but at this juncture the matter remains ambiguous.

Next, we encounter a series of negations. Grace is not ‘works.’ Grace is not deserved. Grace is divine and not human and so forth. We find our definition-search improving, but nailing it down seems like grabbing smoke.

Then we notice how Bible writers connect grace with certain teachings they claim are important. These doctrines quickly begin to unlock the definition and our understanding improves.

When we encounter the cross, though, all the previous material takes on substance. The fog lifts and the reason for the delay becomes evident.

God could have given us a short definition but it would be pitifully shallow. The longer route turns out to be deeper and infinitely more satisfying. A brief definition would save us time but time seems a low-priority item with him. Other matters, such as a job done thoroughly, appear more important to the Father...especially when it has to do with blessing his people.

Grace itself would never short-change us with paltry definitions. So God goes about defining grace in the only way that could do it justice. Grace is altogether too glorious to do it any other way. Why? Grace reflects an essential element of God’s character. Each member of the Trinity contributes in his own awesome way. Looking at it like that, it seems amazing that the Lord managed to define it at all, since grace is involved with defining himself.

Yet once we grasp it, we say, Oh! How remarkably **simple**! Then we do a double-take and say, But how incredibly **profound**!

Well after all, that’s typical of God’s style, isn’t it? Did we expect anything else?

That's one reason I believe the doctrines of grace are biblical. They're his style. His fingerprints are all over them.

So, the study of grace turns out to be an involved journey, with unexpected twists. The trip is long but not boring, and truly exhilarating. One of these twists is that while we are defining grace, we find *ourselves* defined more clearly...like it or not. There is plenty of glorious scenery on the way, though, and different people delight in contemplating various views of the route.

Some revel in the authority of a sovereign Will. Others savor the security of an eternal covenant. Still others are enthralled at the power of the cross. Personally, the part of the trip I enjoy the most, is that it lasts forever.

Enjoy the journey.

Introduction

Four hundred years ago, the Protestant Reformation caused a rediscovery of the Bible, and with it, the revolutionary doctrines it contains. Several of these doctrines conflicted with the teachings of the time because each affirmed that salvation is by grace alone, with no contribution by man. Consequently, these doctrines are known today among Christians as the *doctrines of grace*.

The controversy continues. These biblical teachings are so destructive to man's pride, that human emotion rebels against them. Sinful human nature imagines itself to be captain of its fate, fully able to contribute to its own salvation.

This study of the doctrines of grace was done originally in Spanish by a missionary to Latin America. For easier memorization, these key Biblical doctrines were in the form of an acronym. That is, each letter of the words, JESUS (Yes, Jesus) represents one of the doctrines of grace. For the purposes of this English version, the author has chosen to maintain this form to preserve the acronym and simplify the study of these truths.

The Acronym

Sovereignty of God

S The word sovereign means control everything. This doctrine teaches that God controls everything that happens, and that all reality is a consequence of divine decrees established from eternity, before the creation of the world.

Inability of man

I When Adam fell, mankind lost all ability to contribute to salvation. Sin infects every aspect of the individual and enslaves him. This doctrine also deals with the question of free will, showing that a sinner is incapable of choosing Christ, or producing saving faith, apart from a miracle of grace. Total Inability or Total Depravity are other terms frequently used to describe this teaching.

Justification by faith alone

J God requires nothing less than absolute righteousness, as described in his moral Law. How then is it possible to be righteous before God, knowing that we cannot keep the Law perfectly? Christ fulfilled the Law's demands as our substitute, both in his life and in his death. When we accept Christ, God not only forgives our sins, but also attributes to us the perfect righteousness of Christ. Thus, we have an imputed perfection relative to God's holy demands, and this forms the basis of our permanent acceptance before God.

Election by grace

E Before the foundation of the world, God chose certain individuals as recipients of his marvelous grace. He did this apart from any foreseen conditions in us. God's choice was not because He saw ahead of time that the person would choose Christ. No one could do that anyway since all were dead in sin. Though election has no basis in human merits, it is not arbitrary. This doctrine presents grace as a product of God's sovereign decree in eternity, and not as a response to something man thinks or does.

Sacrifice of Christ

S The sacrifice of Jesus is the only cause of the salvation of the elect. The Crucifixion made salvation much more than a mere possibility. It *accomplished* salvation for all the elect. Although Christ's sacrifice is sufficient to save everyone, God the Father designed it for his elect only. The cross is the power-source that guarantees that God's chosen ones will believe and be obedient. This doctrine is also called *limited atonement*, and sometimes *particular redemption*.

Unity and universality of the church

U The Church of Christ is essentially an invisible organism, rather than a visible organization. It is composed of all the elect of God throughout the ages. Christians have a spiritual unity among themselves, whether or not they are unified organizationally. This unity is therefore spiritual and invisible, not terrestrial and visible. It is universal in the sense that the spirituality of the body of Christ, and the communion the elect have with one other, transcends all limits of culture and time.

Security of the believer

S The same grace that saved us, preserves us to the end. Through exhortations, warnings and fatherly rebukes, God preserves his elect so that none of them will be lost.

Questions for Review

1. The doctrines of grace lead us to the conclusion that salvation is solely by _____, without any human contribution.
2. The Reformation doctrines are known today as _____.
3. True _____ or False _____: The doctrines of grace are no longer controversial today.
4. Sinful human nature wants to be _____ of its own _____.
5. True _____ or False _____: Man is capable of contributing to his own salvation.
sovereignty of God
6. What does sovereign mean? _____
7. True _____ or False _____: Reality is a consequence of the divine decrees.
8. When did God decide all things? _____

Inability of man / Total depravity

9. Which parts of the human individual were affected by sin? _____
10. This doctrine teaches that a sinner's will is incapable of coming to Christ for _____.
11. True _____ or False _____: Saving faith comes from our own free will.
12. Where does saving faith come from? _____
13. Our inability to contribute to our salvation came about through the fall of _____.

Justification by faith alone

14. True _____ or False _____: The righteousness of the Law has nothing to do with the Christian.
15. God only accepts the _____ of Christ.
16. Can we fulfill the Law for ourselves? _____
17. Who fulfilled the Law for us? _____

18. When we accept Christ, God grants to us the perfect _____ of Christ.

Election by grace

19. Justification means _____.

20. True _____ or False _____ God chose everyone to be a recipient of his grace.

21. True _____ or False _____ No one can choose Christ under his own power.

22. Before we knew Christ, we were _____ in sin.

Sacrifice of Christ (Limited Atonement)

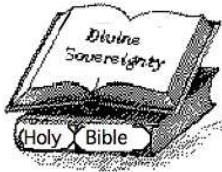
23. What makes salvation effective for the elect? _____.

24. The death of Christ not only made salvation a _____, it _____ it.

25. True _____ or False _____ The cross was insufficient to save everyone.

Answers: 1. Grace 2. The doctrines of grace 3. F 4. Master, fate 5. F 6. Controlling everything 7. T 8. Before the creation of the world 9. All of them 10. Salvation 11. F 12. God 13. Adam 14. F 15. Righteousness of Christ 16. no 17. Christ 18. Attributed, righteousness 19. Declared just 20. F 21. T 22. Dead 23. The cross 24. Possibility, accomplished 25. F

Chapter One: Sovereignty of God



The sovereignty of God is the only legitimate basis for a solid faith. Although someone might claim to have faith without believing in God's sovereignty, a close examination exposes a trust based on human ability. Divine sovereignty is so crucial to biblical Christianity that without it, our faith is scarcely worthy of the name Christian. But the pervasive influence of humanism in modern society has deeply affected every domain of thinking, from the political to the religious. Even among conservative Christians, the sovereignty of God is frequently neglected in the pulpit. This is unfortunate, because it is the only possible foundation for a stable Christian walk. Everything else crumbles under the pressures of life.

This doctrine contends that all reality is a product of divine decrees established before the creation of the world. It claims that God is in control of everything that happens, good or bad. This does not mean, however, that God causes evil or is the author of sin. Nor does He rejoice in the sufferings of his creation. It indicates that everything forms part of a great plan that will inevitably result in his glory.

Why do we say it is the only valid foundation for the believer's faith?

First, only a sovereign God can guarantee his promises. Only if He controls everything can we trust him for salvation. Otherwise, something He does not govern might prevent him from saving us. Is it logical to trust in a God who does not control everything?

Second, if God were not sovereign, it would be impossible to derive spiritual lessons from the events of our lives. We could never know if God is teaching us something, or if the episodes of life are mere happenstance. Trusting God would be little better than trusting to luck.

Third, the sovereignty of God is the only basis on which to give him glory. Unless He is responsible for the entire work of salvation in our lives, why give him all the glory?

Fourth, this is the only basis for prayer. Why pray to a God Who is not sovereign? Unless He controls everything, then perhaps He cannot answer us, either.

The very idea of sovereignty implies unlimited control and authority. It is impossible for God to be a little bit sovereign or even mostly sovereign. Thus, it is illogical to contend, God is sovereign, *but* ... If we add the word *but*, we confess we do not really believe God to be sovereign. Such affirmations are like proposing that God is somewhat infinite, or almost all-powerful. Any effort to qualify God's sovereignty is a tacit denial of it.

How we know God is sovereign

Four foundational biblical ideas establish the sovereignty of God. These follow in logical order:

- The divine attributes of Omniscience and Omnipotence.
- The immutable will of God. (This means 'unchangeable.')
- Reality as a product of God's will.
- God owns everything.

First Foundation: His attributes

The Bible teaches God's Omniscience, meaning that He knows everything. *Known to God from eternity are all his works. Acts. 15:18*

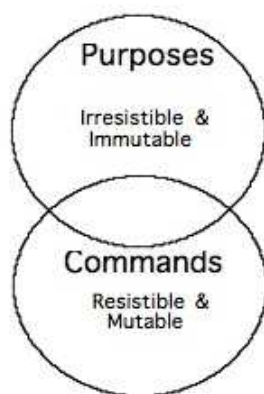
Omnipotent means that God is Almighty... *because the Lord our God Almighty reigns... Rev. 19:6*

Denial of the sovereignty of God implies a denial of one or both attributes. Example: Suppose something happens that God did not ordain. It could only be for one of two reasons: Either He did not know it was going to happen, or He lacked the power to prevent it.

In the first case, he would not be all-knowing. In the second, He would not be all-powerful. The existence of these two attributes makes it impossible for anything to happen without divine permission.

Second Foundation: Immutability

The word immutable means never changing. It also carries the idea of irresistible. This term is found in Hebrews 6:17-19. To better understand it, it helps to distinguish between two aspects of the divine will. These are his will of command versus his will of purpose.



God expressed his will of commands as moral edicts, such as the 10 Commandments. God allows people to transgress these laws, and man sins in doing so. But when God decrees that He will fulfill a certain purpose, He allows no one to invalidate or hinder that it.

Example: Suppose God said, Do you see that tree? I command that no one should cut it down. This would be a divine injunction, the expression of his will of commands. Would God permit someone to cut the tree down? Yes, because God allows his commands to be broken.

Suppose, though, that God said, My sovereign purpose is that this tree never be cut down. Would God allow someone to cut it down? No power on earth, human or demonic, could cut down that tree. God would prevent it.

Were it not for his will of commands, man would not be allowed to sin. And without his Will of Purpose, we would lack the confidence that God could fulfill his promises.

Theological disaster results from ignoring the difference between these two aspects of God's will.

So, his will of command can be resisted. God himself may choose to change to his commands. Not only does He allow his commands to be broken, He may even annul them. (The Old Testament ceremonial laws, for example, are no longer binding.)

Not so with immutable decrees. These never change, and no one stops him from accomplishing them. This idea is sometimes expressed in scripture as his counsels.

My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure. Is.46:10

Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath,

Other times, the word purpose expresses the same thought.

... according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will. Eph.1:11

For the Lord of Hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? his hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back? Is.14:27

Some texts may not use these terms, but the idea comes across unmistakably.

... He does according to his will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain his hand or say to him, 'What have You done?' Dan.4:35

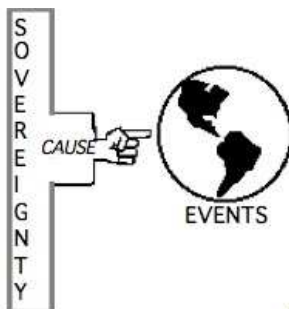
Through this 'Immutability' concept, we see more clearly what is meant by the phrase sovereignty of God. We have more than solid grounds for trusting him.

Third Foundation: Reality is a product of God's will

For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast. Psalm 33:9

This answers the question, Where does reality come from?

According to the Bible, all reality is a product of the divine decrees, established before the foundation of the world.



By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible. Hebrews 11:3

This verse can be translated as, *By faith we understand **that the epochs of time** were established.*

The events of history, good or bad, have taken place by the will of God. This includes the most important as well as the most insignificant events.

You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created. Revelation 4:11

This affirmation is clear. All things owe their existence to God.

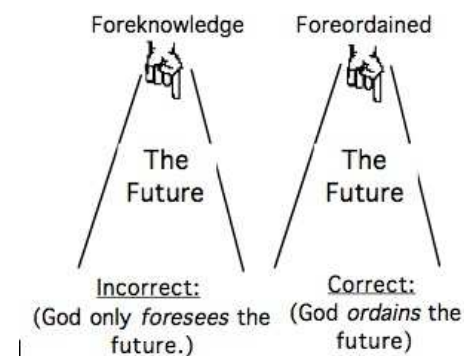
Occasionally we read in the Gospels, ...*this happened that the word might be fulfilled* ... This phrase says more than that prophet simply predicted the event. It says that the event took place to fulfill the decrees of Scripture. Normally, people involved in fulfilling these prophecies were unaware they were fulfilling anything.

In this we see the bottom-line principle behind the sovereignty of God: **Reality is a product of the will of God.** A prophecy is simply a declaration of that will. Reality obeys what God has commanded.

Prophecy therefore is more than divine foresight. It is a declaration of infallible divine intent. Here are several examples:

In Matthew 21:1-4, Jesus told his disciples to look for a certain donkey in a village. Surely the owner was unaware of Zechariah's prophecy concerning Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The entire incident illustrates the sovereignty of God in the sense that the prophecy was more than divine foresight. It was a divine arrangement.

When the crowd came to capture Jesus in Gethsemane He said this occurred to fulfill the Scriptures.¹ In the texts that describe the arrest and crucifixion, it's obvious that everything takes place according to a divine plan.



The Roman soldiers divided Christ's garments to fulfill *what was written by the prophet*. These pagans were unaware they were fulfilling Scripture.

How does God know the future with certainty? Some suppose that God has a mental capacity, like a supreme fortune-teller, allowing him to peer in the future; as though He had a telescope through which to look down the corridor of time and

examine coming events. Some teachers even assert that God forms his plans based on this discernment. This idea is called the Concept of Foreknowledge.

Many Christians believe this idea today. Yes, the word foreknowledge appears in Scripture. However, to interpret it strictly in terms of a passive divine observation is a defective approach. After all, Who created time? Did God create it? Or is time something God discovered by chance in the course of eternity?

If God created everything, then He also created time. And if He created time, He also ordained the events that occur in it. If we deny this, we are affirming that God created the universe without purpose, or without full comprehension of what He was creating.

The only sensible option left is the Scriptural teaching about sovereign Decrees. The foreknowledge of God is simply his own understanding of his purposes, which no power in the universe can change.

Fourth foundation: God owns everything

During a Bible study, a woman asked, Who owns the earth, God or Satan? With all the wickedness going on, it looks like Satan! What does Scripture teach?

Exodus 9:29 ...that you may know that the earth is the Lord's.

Exodus 19: 5 ...for all the earth is Mine.

I Deuteronomy 10:14 Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the Lord your God, also the earth with all that is in it.

Job 41:11 Everything under heaven is Mine.

I Chronicles 29:11 Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, The power and the glory, The victory and the majesty; For all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, And You are exalted as head over all.

Psalms 89:11 The heavens are Yours, the earth also is Yours; The world and all its fullness, You have founded them.

Some imagine that when Adam fell into sin, God lost control of the earth. Note that all the above verses are post-fall, present tense. With Adam's Fall, God lost nothing. The only loser was Adam.

Let's delve into some specific categories of reality that God controls.

God Is Sovereign

Over nature

Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. Matt. 10:29

According to Jesus, the Father controls the lives of animals. Not even the most insignificant bird can die without God's permission. The same is true for us, Jesus said. We are worth much more than the birds, and cannot die until our Father allows it.

God brought quail to the Israelites. He closed the lions' mouths in the presence of Daniel. He placed a coin in the mouth of a fish that Peter would catch. He used frogs, lice and flies as judgment on Egypt. He sent grasshoppers against Israel, brought the animals to Noah's ark, and fed Elisha by means of ravens.

God also manifests his sovereignty through use of the inanimate. He controlled the Flood, sent darkness, hail and fire upon the Egyptians. Christ rebuked and calmed the storm. God caused the sun to stand still at the command of Joshua. Not even a fly can buzz without divine permission.

Over human governments and the human race

And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, Acts 17:26

The first thing Paul preached to the Athenian pagans was the sovereignty of God. He realized that this truth is central to a proper understanding of the Gospel.

The book of Daniel is a complete study of God's sovereignty in human government. God taught King Nebuchadnezzar a difficult lesson about Who establishes kings on the earth. (Dan. 4:17) After having received divine punishment for his pride, the king recognized this with the words,

All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to his will in the army of heaven And among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain his hand Or say to him, What have You done? Dan. 4:35

Over the human will

Can God overrule the limits of the human will? Does God's sovereignty extend even to man's will and thoughts? The Scriptures provide an answer.

The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, Like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes. Prov. 21:1

For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill his purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. Rev. 17:17

If it is easy for God to alter the course of a river, then it would not be difficult to change the heart of a king. So if He can change even a king's heart, how much more the hearts of ordinary men?

God gave Israel favor in the sight of the Egyptian people, and then hardened Pharaoh's heart to show his power.

And the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them what they requested. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.

Then I will harden Pharaoh's heart, so that he will pursue them ... Ex.12:36; 14:4

There are many plans in a man's heart, Nevertheless the Lord's counsel that will stand. Prov. 19:21

True, man has a will. But it is not *sovereign*. Some have preached as though the will of man were a holy ground on which God himself cannot tread. The only inviolable will in the universe, is God's.

Over evil

God never compels anyone to sin. Though He is sovereign, He cannot be accused of being the Author of sin. Man sins because he has a sinful nature, not because God compels him.

Nevertheless, no one can sin unless God permits it. The Bible reveals that even the circumstances surrounding sinful acts are under God's sovereign control. He has power to prevent or to allow man to sin. It is just as offensive to declare that God cannot prevent man from sinning as to declare that God causes sin.

How can God limit sin and control its circumstances without being guilty of causing it?

When a rat is placed in a cage, it usually runs around the inside walls. Rarely will it just sit in the middle of the cage, because its natural environment is usually closed-in areas such as tunnels, under the ground, etc. Rats feel more comfortable pressing against something. If we want to see a rat running in circles, we simply place it in a round cage. Its movements are predictable without any violation of its nature.

The same happens with man. God controls his sinful actions by simply arranging the circumstances surrounding the act. Through his intimate knowledge of the nature and character of those involved, God remains in control of everything, yet is not responsible for the sin committed. He obliges no one to sin, though He may indeed arrange the circumstances that allow people to express what is already in their heart.

The outstanding example of this is the arrest and crucifixion of Christ.

Jesus said to them, Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes'? Matthew 21:42

Paradoxically the rejection of Christ by the Jews was something that Matthew attributed to God. Not only did He know about it ahead of time, but, *The Lord has done this*. Nevertheless, the Jewish leaders acted according to their own desires, without compulsion. God's will of command told them not to harm his prophets. God's will of purpose decreed that this was exactly what needed to take place to fulfill his higher purposes in redemption.

For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together, *...to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. Acts 4:27-28*

The sovereignty of God and man's freedom run together through Scripture like two train rails. They complement each another. The Bible writers never considered this a contradiction. They affirmed the two, as shown in the preceding text, without the slightest reservation.

Motivated by selfishness and hatred, Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. Obedience to God was farthest from their minds. Notwithstanding, the Scriptures describe this treachery as a divine act.

So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. Gen.45:8

But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Gen. 50:20

As part of the divine judgment upon David for his sin with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah, God declares that other men *will lie with the wives of David*, before all Israel. The way this decree is expressed is very revealing:

Thus says the Lord: 'Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. 12 For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun.' 2 Sam. 12:11-12

When David's son Absalom temporarily ruled, he committed incest with his father's wives. Though it seems odd to assert it, this happened as God's judgment on David. God himself raised up Absalom as a rebel against David and decreed this would take place. Nonetheless, Absalom alone was guilty of the sins of rebellion and incest although God decreed these acts as judgments.

How could God decree this and remain holy? The Lord simply provided Absalom the opportunity to express what was already in his perverse heart.

Doctrines of this type are like raw meat for some people ...hard to swallow. But they are the clear teachings of the word of God. If God is sovereign over all, then He is also sovereign over evil. Otherwise, we cannot call him sovereign.

Other Scriptural examples of the sovereignty of God over evil are: King Saul killed himself by falling on his own sword, according to 1 Chronicles 10:4. Yet in Chapter 5, verse 14 we note that it was God Who killed him.

The Apostle Paul teaches that the unbelief of the Jews forms part of the divine plan to include the Gentiles in the covenant of grace. (Rom. 11:7-11)

When David fled from Jerusalem, Shimei cursed him. This was wicked on Shimei's part. Nonetheless, David recognized that Shimei did what the Lord had decreed.

Let him alone, and let him curse; for so the Lord has ordered him. 2 Sam. 16:11

Even evil spirits are under God's control. God sent an evil spirit to speak through the false prophets during Ahab's reign.

Therefore look! The Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets of yours, and the Lord has declared disaster against you. 1Kings 22:23

The deceptions that afflict men sometimes come from God as judgments for rejecting the truth. The sovereign Lord himself chooses the kind of deception suffered.

And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. 1Thess. 2:11

I also will choose their delusions ...Isa. 66:4

The Scriptures attribute to the Lord the stubbornness of Eli's sons in spurning their father's reproaches. God allowed them to express their wickedness as judgment against Eli for his fatherly negligence and poor example as priest.

Nevertheless they did not heed the voice of their father, because the Lord desired to kill them. 1Sam. 2:25

Sickness came into the world because of sin. *But, Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord? Ex. 4:11*

A hurricane destroys a town. A landslide buries a village. *If there is calamity in a city, will not the Lord have done it? Amos 3:6b*

Although Satan is an active agent of evil, divine permission limits his activities. Like a tethered dog, he has freedom up to the length of the leash. The same is true of man. We know who holds the other end of the leash.

A comforting tension

We find ourselves in a philosophical tension between the sovereignty of God and human responsibility. This tension may feel uncomfortable. How can we arrive at a comfortable position?

The answer is that we cannot escape the discomfort entirely. Paradoxically, God wants us to experience comfort in the midst of an uncomfortable tension. He considers this tension healthy for us. God's sovereign power on one side, and man's responsibility on the other, are two truths, neither of which we can abandon.

As the late Dr. Francis Schaeffer put it, *For God to be God, and for man to be man, both must be true.*²

Jesus went to the cross conscious that *the time of darkness* had arrived. Although He knew that the agents of darkness had captured him, it was not into the darkness that He commended his Spirit. He accepted the cup of suffering from the hand of the Father, not as from Satan. He did not rejoice in the pain, but in the greater good that would result. This is the consolation point in the tension where God wants us to live.

Questions for Review: The sovereignty of God

1. What is the only basis for a solid faith?
2. Those who do not believe in the sovereignty of God place their faith in _____ ability.
3. What is the central doctrine of the Bible?
4. What happens when one's faith is not based on the sovereignty of God? _____.
5. The sovereignty of God means that all reality is the result of the _____ established before the creation of the world.
6. Neither good nor _____ escapes the _____ of God.
7. True or False: _____ God is the Author of sin.
8. Everything that happens is by the _____ of God.
9. Only a _____ God can guarantee the fulfillment of his promises.
10. True or False _____ Satan can deter God.
11. True or False _____ The events of our lives are chiefly caused by luck or happenstance.
12. True or False _____ God has decreed all that is to happen.
13. What is the only basis of giving God glory? _____

14. We give all the glory to God because He does _____ the work.
15. Is it logical to pray to a God Who is not sovereign? _____
16. Why is it illogical to pray to a God who is not sovereign? _____
17. The word sovereign means _____.
18. Today a new gospel is being preached that focuses on _____ instead of the _____ of God.
19. True or False _____ The will of God concerning his eternal purposes can be resisted or can go unfulfilled.

The foundations for this doctrine

1. What are the four biblical foundations for the sovereignty of God?
- A. _____
 - B. _____
 - C. _____
 - D. _____
2. The Bible teaches that God is Omniscient. This means that He _____.
3. The word Omnipotent means that God is _____.
4. Give two of God's attributes: _____ and _____
5. Which word means unchangeable? _____
6. This word can also mean _____
7. True or False _____ God allows men to sin.
8. When God has decreed something, He allows no one to _____ it.
9. True or False _____ God cannot go against someone's will.
10. Is God in control of the human will? _____
11. Give a Scripture verse to support your answer to question number 10. _____
12. Reality is the product of _____.
13. Human history has unfolded the way it has because of the _____ of God.

14. True or False _____ The important events of history were decreed by God but the insignificant ones happened by chance.

15. Certain prophecies _____ the _____ prophesied.

16. True or False _____ Although God is responsible for everything that happens, He is the Author of sin.

Answers: 1 = The sovereignty of God; 2 = human 3 = The sovereignty of God; 4= it is shipwrecked, crumbles 5= Divine decrees 6= bad; sovereignty 7= F 8= will 9= Sovereign 10= F 11= F 12= T 13= The Sovereignty of God 14= all 15= no 16= Because He does not deserve all the glory 17= controlling everything 18= man, honor 19= F

Foundations of this doctrine 1= His attributes of Omnipotence and Omniscience; his immutable will; reality as a product of his ; God is Lord of everything and therefore, He controls everything. 2. Knows everything 3. All powerful 4. Omniscience and Omnipresence 5. Immutable 6. Irresistible 7. T 8. Resist 9. False 10. yes 11. see text 12. The divine decrees 13. The decreed will of God 14. F 15. Produce, events 16. F

Chapter Two: Inability of Man

A favorite myth of lost humanity is the assumption of the moral neutrality of man's will. The sinner imagines himself in a neutral position, equally suspended between good and evil, with the ability to choose between the two whenever it suits him.

A sinner usually presupposes the ability to repent and come to God any time he wishes. He perceives himself in total control with regard to all moral questions, and the master of his own destiny. He sees himself in possession of a faculty called Free Will, and defines it as an impartial ability and right to choose whatever suits him.

All religious groups affirm a doctrine of Free Will by some definition. But they differ in the meaning of the word free. Clearly our will possesses limitations, so it is not 'free' in every conceivable respect. We cannot sprout wings and fly by willing it, nor do we augment our intelligence to the level of Einstein by force of will. As we quickly discover in moral struggles, our will is sometimes our friend, and sometimes a determined enemy. It is limited in some respects, but not in others.

Some groups feel that the Free Will of man escaped the effects of the fall and remained morally neutral, as the only faculty that remained unaffected. Others assert that the will was weakened by sin, but that it continues to possess the ability to contribute to salvation. Then again, others affirm that sin dominates all human faculties, and that the sinner is incapable of seeking salvation without an effectual work of grace.

Our view of divine grace will ultimately depend on what we assume about the abilities and limitations of the will. Consequently, it is imperative to define carefully its abilities and limitations.

We affirm the following:

1. All aspects of the human organism, before the New Birth, are dominated by sin and controlled by Satan.
2. The will of man, also dominated by sin, will never desire salvation nor accept Christ on its own initiative without a miracle of the grace of God.
3. The New Birth is a sovereign act of God, in which the sinner is entirely passive, until God grants the gift of saving faith. It is not because we have faith that we are born again. We have faith because we are born again. The human will is not the cause of the New Birth.

The word free is the source of most of the confusion in this discussion because of its ambiguity. Free can mean ability, or permission or even neutrality. It is important therefore to define our terms before entering such a dialogue. In the face of biblical teachings, certain definitions of the term Free Will are valid, and others are not.

It is biblically valid to affirm free will in the following senses:

1. The 'right' to choose the good ...though the 'right' to do a thing does not prove the ability to do so.
2. The power to choose in morally neutral matters, such as what we will eat for breakfast.
3. The power to choose between certain external actions of a good or bad nature, such as whether to give to a charity, or deciding to read the Bible instead of a pornographic magazine.
4. The ability to participate in certain religious practices, such as attending meetings, learning hymns, praying, etc.

But it is unscriptural to affirm Free Will in the following senses:

1. The ability of the sinner to repent and accept Christ, entirely on his own initiative.
2. The ability to contribute anything at all, by deed or thought, which could attract the grace of God.
3. Moral neutrality.
4. The faculty of a person's being which ultimately governs his choices.

Importance of the doctrine

A good grasp of the doctrine of the inability of man puts our pride in its place. Why should we be proud about something we never accomplished? Instead, we receive a new security in our relationship with God. After all, if God could overcome the natural resistance of a sinful nature to change our obstinate heart, surely He can preserve us for his eternal kingdom, despite the resistance of our sinful flesh.

The instant the Christian realizes that his will is not the grounds of his salvation, then the word 'grace' takes on its correct definition. The believer learns that he did not convert himself and that salvation is not a cooperative work between God and man...*Salvation is of the Lord*. The biblical grounds of this teaching are...

Original Sin

God created Adam with marvelous gifts. One of these was the ability to choose between good and evil. We call this faculty, Free Will.

When Adam fell into sin, his entire being became enslaved to sin, including his will. The Bible never insinuates that any of Adam's faculties escaped the power of sin. To imply the neutrality of the human will is to assume that this faculty escaped miraculously when Adam fell. Does the Bible imply this?

The effects of the fall of Adam are explained in Rom. 5;12-21. In this passage we learn that we inherited Adam's death, condemnation and judgment. The guilt of the sin of Adam was attributed to his offspring.

From this we derive an central fact of human existence: Man sins because he is a sinner; he is not a sinner because he sins. Man is condemned first because of what he **is**; only secondarily because of what he **does**.

What about ‘innocent’ children? No such thing. All are born under the condemnation and slavery of sin.

The heart governs the man, not his will

Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life. Prov.4:23

A widespread presupposition exists that it is the will of man which decides his actions. This not only contracts the Scripture, but it also contracts logic. How can a human will be ‘free’ from the nature of the person in which it is found? One always chooses that which he likes. That which we like reflects what we are in heart. So, it is the heart, (that is, the internal nature), that directs a person’s choices, not his will.

The will is never ‘free’ from the true nature of the creature in which it is found.

Put a duck, for example, between a body of water and a sand pile. It will always choose the water. Why? Because it chooses according to its desires. It has free will only within the limits of its nature.

Christ himself underlined this principle when He said to the Pharisees,

Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. Matt. 12:34

The Bible teaches it is the heart of man that governs him. (Matt.12:33-37; 15:18-19 & Pr.4:23) If his heart is dominated by sin, then so is his will.

An illustration: The coyote is an animal that cannot be domesticated. By nature it will always be wild, even if raised by humans. Nevertheless, let us suppose for illustrations’ sake, that during a walk in the woods, we encounter a coyote. We think, How lovely it would be to have a coyote as a mascot! Let’s persuade the coyote to come with us!

So we approach the coyote and say, Coyote, if you come with us, you will have plenty of food. You’ll be protected from your enemies. We will be friends, and have a good time. Thinking that the coyote is now persuaded, we extend our hand to pick him up.

What will the coyote do? Being the kind of animal he is, he will bite. Here is where we face the central question: Does the coyote have free will or not?

This question is a trap. A straightforward and absolute answer does not exist, because it depends on the angle from which we deal with the question. If we define the will of the coyote as the ability to choose between wild and domestic, then we would say that he does not have free will. But if we define free will as his ability to choose within the limits of his nature, then yes, he has free will.

This illustration suggests to us a more realistic definition of free will and more in accord with biblical data. The sinner has free will within the limits of his nature. If sin governs

his nature then he will choose sinful autonomy rather than submission to God, since that is what he truly prefers. For his mind to change, it is essential that God work some changes in the man's nature. We will see how this happens a little later when we study the New Birth.

Dead? Or just sick?

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. Eph. 2:1-3

The carnal man may perceive himself as a sinner, but never morally dead in the sense of total inability to be otherwise. But the Bible says that we were ...*dead in trespasses and sins*.

Religious groups that believe in free will (in the sense of moral neutrality), frequently preach as though the sinner were simply sick. They may even use illustrations taken from the field of medicine. The sinner is portrayed as seriously ill, but with a certain ability to accept the 'medicine' of the Gospel if he wishes. Such a concept is unbiblical. The Bible presents the sinner as dead, not sick; totally incapacitated, not with some ability to please God if he happens to wish it.

Can the dead raise themselves? 'Dead' implies total inability. But the pride of man will not tolerate such news about himself.

Paul continues his discourse in Ephesians 2 by showing that we were conformists.

... according to the course of this world ...

We went through life under the illusion that all our thoughts were really our own. We thought we were being original, without realizing that we were typical products of a perverse society. The only thing original about us was original sin.

Paul also reveals that we were puppets of an evil being... *the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience ...*

Finally, Paul exposes that our will was not controlling us after all, because it was enslaved by our flesh. *...fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind ...*

In short, the Apostle Paul appears distinctly unimpressed with the condition of man's 'free will'.

Another text underlining the total inability of man is Rom.3:9-18. According to v.9, all are '*under sin*'. This domination is expressed in the following:

There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. v.10-11

If there are none who understand, then can a sinner grasp the essence of the gospel on his own? Can we allege that the sinner has an inherent power of will to seek God, if Scripture declares that nobody ever does so? If no one can do good, then may we suppose that the sinner possesses the power to commit himself to Christ? Is that not a 'good'? If there is no fear of God in them, may we expect them to throw themselves on God's mercy on their own accord?

This state of affairs is illustrated by C.S.Lewis,

Agnostics speak openly about seeking God. For me, it makes more sense to speak of the rat seeking the cat... . God trapped me. 3

If there exists the least suspicion that the carnal nature of man could submit to God, Rom.8:7 is sufficient to put it aside for good:

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. Rom. 8:7

Every aspect of man's being is controlled by sin

The sinner neither understands nor seeks after God. (Rom.3:11). His understanding is darkened. (Ef.4:18). He is blind to spiritual things and considers them foolishness. (1Cor.2:14). His mind cannot submit to God, (Rom.8:7) he is God's enemy (Col.1:21) and blinded by Satan, (2Cor.4:4). The thoughts of his heart are evil continually. (Ge.6:5).

His will is controlled by Satan, (Eph.2:3), so that he is unable to repent without God granting him repentance. (2Tim.2:26) He cannot come to Christ unless God draws him.(Jn.6:44,65).

Someone asked the great theologian San Augustine if he believed in free will. He replied, Of course! Without Christ, we are totally free from all righteousness!

How does God regard the good works of the unsaved?

He does not regard them at all, because no unsaved person has ever done a good work.

Impossible!, exclaimed a doctor in one of my theology courses. Now I know that you are really off base, professor! he said. I know many fine non-Christians who provide for their families, give to charity, serve the community and are good conscientious citizens. Are you saying that these good works are evil?

Although the answer may shock the modern humanist culture, the answer to the doctor's exclamations is an uncompromising Yes! God counts all the good works of the unsaved, including those that agree with his commands, as sinful acts. This is true for two reasons:

First, because these works proceed from a corrupted source, and second, they are practiced from impure motives.

First, the unregenerate heart is dominated by sin, with the self enthroned as the central ruling figure, and its own pride and benefit as the highest value. Until this perverted nature is transformed, and the SELF dethroned, the entire nature of man is a fountain of corruption. Whatever proceeds from such a fountain will be tainted with corruption, and God's holiness will accept none of it. This is true even if the deed performed is outwardly good. Jesus said, Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. Matt. 7:17

No wonder Isaiah exclaimed, *And all our righteousness's are like filthy rags ...* ⁴ Take some filthy rags, make a sweater out of them, and present them to a prince. See how pleased he is with it. But that is what the unregenerate do when they imagine that God is pleased with their good works.

Secondly, the motives of the unregenerate are impure. How do we know this? Because, for whatever is not from faith is sin. Rom. 14:23 ⁵ After all, whatever is done for other motives than the glory of God and submission to his will is merely a subtle form of rebellion.

The unregenerate are never so corrupt as when they are being charitable. The only thing that could be worse, is when they are being religious. Such works serve no only to deceive the unsaved into imagining they are good, and that God must be pleased with them.

After all, if the unsaved really wanted to please God, then they would do the first thing that God requires: Repent and submit to the Lordship of his Son.

What shall we do, that we may work the works of God? ⁶, the Apostles asked. In the next verse, Jesus replied, This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom He sent.

This term *believe* implies something more profound than the accomplishment of a good work. It suggests a personal trust in Christ that leads directly to an obedience that dethrones the self. This faith places Jesus as the central figure in the life of a person, and his will as the highest value. No work of any unsaved person, however outwardly good he may be, can be an adequate substitute for this self-abandonment.

The unregenerate do good works and religious acts as *substitutes* for submission, rather than signs of the auto-negation of a purified heart. The self remains enthroned.

Was this not the problem with the Pharisees? Did not Jesus say that the prostitutes and thieves were closer to the kingdom of God than they? Was this a mere poetic exaggeration?

Many works of the Pharisees were in accord with the divine Law since obedience to the Law was the central focus of their movement. In what sense then, were the works of the Pharisees worse than those of prostitutes and robbers? The self-deception involved in a work proceeding from a corrupt heart perverts any deed into a sin worse than those just mentioned.

So it is not surprising that Paul, while discoursing on unregenerate humanity, said: There is none righteous, no, not one; Rom.3:10

Is this a brand new doctrine, recently invented? Note that an ancient Christian document written in 1648, (The Westminster Confession of Faith), affirms:

Works done by unregenerate men, although for the matter of them they may be things which God commands; and of good use both to themselves and others: yet, because they proceed not from an heart purified by faith; nor are done in a right manner, according to the word; nor to a right end, the glory of God, they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God, or make a man meet to receive grace from God: and yet, their neglect of them is more sinful and displeasing unto God. (Chapter 16, Art.7)

God requires good works of everyone, including from the unsaved. Yet when the unsaved do them, they are sinning. If they fail to do them, however, the omission is even worse. Sadly, they never contribute to their salvation, only their condemnation. This is the essence of slavery to sin.

Nothing less than the incredible miracle of the new birth can change this hopeless situation.

Special questions on total inability

Question A: How can God make us responsible for doing good if we cannot do it? How can God condemn someone for practicing sin if he can do nothing else?

Place a Bible at one end of a table and bottle of wine at the other. Then take a drunk and put him between the Bible and the wine, with the liberty to choose between the two. Which will the drunk choose? Obviously he will choose the wine, because that his nature. He has full liberty to choose right, and the responsibility to do so. But he lacks the ability to choose the Bible. Having the liberty does not help him much, because his internal nature determines what he really wants.

We may misinterpret many Bible texts if we fail to consider this difference between liberty and ability. Such texts reveal what man ought to do, rather than what he can do.

The sinner is never free from his responsibility to obey God. Yet he is never able to fulfill that responsibility. The Scripture outline below exposes this terrible paradox between the responsibility of man versus his inability.

Responsibility: Come to Christ, Matt.11:29

Inability: Nobody can come, Jn.6:44

Responsibility: Repent, Hch.3:19

Inability: Repentance is a gift of God, 2Tim.2:25

Responsibility: Circumcise their hearts

Inability: God circumcises their hearts.

Responsibility: Believe, Jn.3:16

Inability: Believe is a gift of God, Ph.1:29

Responsibility: Keep the Law, Rom.2:13

Inability: Nobody can keep the Law, Rom.8:4

Man's inability does not free him from his responsibility to obey God. After all, it is not God's fault that mankind fell into sin. Man's ungodliness does not deprive God of his own holiness, nor does it mitigate his right to require from his creation what is just.

The power that compels man to sin is not external but internal, from within his own nature. But isn't the will of man sort of neutral, able to choose between good and evil?

Many assume the neutrality of the human will, as though it were an organ floating somewhere in our brain, disconnected from our moral state. If this were so, in what sense could we label it *our* will? How could we be held responsible for what our will decides, if it were independent of what we are?

The Bible always presents the will of man as an extension of the character of that person. In the case of the unregenerate, a person always rejects Christ until God changes him.

Finally, the Biblical base of our responsibility before God is not our ability, but our knowledge. We see this in Rom. 1:18-20. The sinner KNOWS certain things by the revelation of God in nature. But he does not SEEK God because he prefers sin.

Question: In the first chapter of this book, titled sovereignty of God, you claim that God is controls of everything, even the will of man. Doesn't this make man a puppet? Are not the doctrines of the sovereignty of God versus the responsibility of man in conflict?

True, there exists a profound philosophical tension between these two aspects of Biblical theology. It becomes easier to grasp however, if we remember that God's control is normally indirect, using human nature itself. Since a person chooses whatever agrees with his own nature, then God must change that nature to motivate the individual to choose salvation. This way, the will of the person chooses freely, according to the revelation God gives. God conserves his own sovereignty, without forcing the person against his will. With some, God leaves them in the sinful situation that they themselves have chosen.

The question of the new birth

How do we come to accept Christ?

If the sinner has no internal motivation to repent and choose Christ, how then are some converted and others not? We resolve this question by considering the order of events in the New Birth.

Two different viewpoints exist about what happens in the New Birth:

One viewpoint says that the sinner makes a decision to believe in Christ and this results in the New Birth. The sinner produces in himself a degree of faith through an act of his free will. God responds to this act, and rewards him with grace, causing him to be born again. The sinner himself initiates the process. God is the passive agent, waiting for the human response. Faith, according to this view, produces the New Birth, so that the sinner contributes to his salvation through faith and obedience.

Another viewpoint says that the sinner is dead in sins, completely unable to believe. God therefore, by a sovereign act, regenerates those whom He has chosen for salvation. The sinner is totally passive in the act of being born again. God is the initiator. Upon being born again, the sinner has a new nature, perceives correctly divine things, and places his faith in Christ. So, being born again produces saving faith, not vice versa. Faith and obedience are results of the new birth, not causes of it. The sinner contributes nothing to his salvation.

Which of these two scenarios is Biblical? By examining the Bible texts on the New Birth, we can compare the interplay between cause and effect. Is our obedience the cause of being born again? Or is being born again the cause of our obedience?

Cause: Jn.3:3: Born again

Effect: See the kingdom of God

Cause: Jer.24:7 God gives a new heart

Effect: That they may know him

Cause: Ez. 16:62,63 God confirms his covenant

Effect: And He will forgive their sins

Cause: Ez. 36:26,27 Gives a new heart

Effect: Obedience

Cause: James1:18: He, of his own will

Effect: Born again

Cause: Ps.65:4: Chosen by God

Effect: Drawn to him

If any doubt remains as to which of the two scenarios mentioned above is correct, then read,

...who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. Jn.1:13

We can illustrate the point another way via the question, where does saving faith come from? Does it come from the free will of man, or is it a work of the grace of God? A similar outline below answers:

Cause: Acts 13:48, As many as had been appointed to eternal life believed

Effect: Acts 18:27, through grace believed.

Cause: Heb.12:2, Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

Effect: Eph.2:8, for by grace you have been saved through faith

Cause: Phil.1:29: it has been granted to believe in him

Effect: Jn.6:65, granted by my Father come to Me.

Does this mean that the will of man remains an inert faculty before, during and after salvation? Is our will a mere puppet, manipulated by a celestial puppeteer? No way!

When our perceptions change, our other faculties of mind follow. When we see the kingdom of God through the illumination that regeneration brings, then conversion to Christ becomes inevitable. God reveals Christ to us as so attractive that his very Person becomes irresistible. The irresistible nature of grace consists in this perception, rather than in a forcing of the human will. Christ is just too good to resist when revealed as He is. Such illumination does not transgress any aspect of man's freedom, nor does any injustice to those who refuse to look to Christ.

Why God grants this illumination to some and not to others, is a mystery hidden in eternity.

The words of the Canons of Dort, a Protestant document written in 1618, express it with beauty and clarity:

He opens the closed and softens the hardened heart ...infuses new qualities into the will, which, though heretofore dead, He quickens; from being evil, disobedient, and refractory, he renders it good, obedient, and pliable; actuates and strengthens it, that like a good tree it may bring forth the fruits of good actions.

The order of events in salvation

New Birth-Faith-Justification

Saving faith is a divine gift, not the fruit of human 'free will'. The new birth is a sovereign act of God. The sinner does not convert himself.

Warning For Pastors

The notion of neutral free will is like a weed in a garden. Just when think you have it rooted out, it sprouts up again. Of all the erroneous ideas about salvation, this one is the most difficult to eradicate among Christians. As a teacher, you will experience more resistance on this point than any other aspect of the doctrines of grace. Proud human nature persists in its desire to make a contribution to salvation, however minimal.

As we teach the doctrine of total human inability, it is advisable to repeat constantly what we are NOT saying. This helps avoid misunderstandings. For example, it helps to say something like, We are not saying that man has no will. He does. But sin enslaves his will. Or, Man is responsible for his actions, although he lacks the strength to fulfill this responsibility because of the power of sin. And, God commands us to do right because He is holy, not because we can obey properly. And We are NOT saying that the sinner has no right to choose salvation, only that he cannot do so without the grace of God.

As a pastor, it may be costly to clarify to the congregation the doctrine of total inability. But it is worth the trouble to insist on it. God will use your teachings to reveal more clearly to them what is the true grace of God. You will be giving them a precious jewel that will enrich their lives forever.

The news of our inability is a blessing

When I teach this doctrine, students generally suppose that they misunderstood when they hear that understanding our Total Depravity is one of the finest blessings they can experience. Although they may be used to hearing paradoxes from me, this one surprises them. At least it gets their attention, and prepares them for the following quotation from the great reformer Martin Luther.

On the comfort of knowing that salvation does not depend on free will

Martin Luther, the famous 16th century reformer commented,

I frankly confess that, for myself, even if it could be, I should not want 'freewill' to be given me, nor anything to be left in my own hands to enable me to endeavor after salvation; not merely because in face of so many dangers, and adversities, and assaults of devils, I could not stand my ground and hold fast my 'freewill' (for one devil is stronger than all men, and on these terms no man could be saved); but because, even were there no dangers, adversities, or devils, I should still be forced to labor with no guarantee of success, and to beat my fists at the air.

If I lived and worked to all eternity, my conscience would never reach comfortable certainty as to how much it must do to satisfy God. Whatever work I had done, there would still be a nagging doubt as to whether it pleased God, or whether He required

something more. The experience of all who seek righteousness by works proves that; and I learned it well enough myself over a period of many years, to my own great hurt. But now that God has taken my salvation out of the control of my own will, and put it under the control of his, and promised to save me, not according to my working or running, but according to his own grace and mercy, I have the comfortable certainty that He is faithful and will not lie to me, and that He is also great and powerful, so that no devils or opposition can break him or pluck me from him. 'No one, ' He says, 'shall pluck them out of my hand, because my Father which gave them me is greater than all' (Jn 10:28-29) Thus it is that, if not all, yet some, indeed many, are saved; whereas, by the power of 'freewill' none at all could be saved, but every one of us would perish.

Furthermore, I have the comfortable certainty that I please God, not by reason of the merit of my works, but by reason of his merciful favor promised to me; so that, if I work too little, or badly, He does not impute it to me, but with fatherly compassion pardons me and makes me better. This the glorying of all the saints in their God. ⁷

Questions on Total Human Inability

Certain verses appear to support the idea of free will, in the sense of moral neutrality. We can organize these according to the following categories:

Verses showing that man chooses evil

Some suppose that because man can choose to sin, he must also have the ability to choose righteousness. This would be like saying that a log has the ability to float upstream merely because it can float downstream. Insisting that man has the power to choose evil is no evidence that he can choose submission to God without a work a grace.

Exhortations and commands to choose the right

Occasionally verses are quoted from the Old Testament in which God commands people to choose the good. God commanded Israel to keep his Law. Is this evidence that man can keep the Law? Of course not. The New Testament shows us that nobody keeps the Law. It was given, rather, to reveal what man CANNOT do, rather than what he CAN do. Why then take verses out of the Law to prove moral free will?

God commands us, be perfect. Does this prove we have an innate ability to be perfect without God and without grace? Why then imagine that unconverted mankind has the ability to choose good on the mere basis of a command?

God commands people to do right because he could hardly command them to do otherwise. Being good himself, he could not command them to do evil. God commands us to do right because HE is just, not because WE are capable.

Verses which show man responsible for his actions

We do not deny that man is responsible for his conduct. We only deny that responsibility implies ability.

The only kind of verses which could possibly refute the doctrine of Total Human Inability, would be those showing that sinful man, without God and without grace, can convert himself. But such verses do not exist. Commands, exhortations, examples of sinners choosing evil, and explanations regarding our responsibility, have nothing to do with the question.

Review Questions
Total Human Inability

1. A popular myth among humanity is _____.
2. This myth is the basis of every distortion of the _____.
3. True or False: _____ All faculties of the sinner are dominated by sin, except his will.
4. True or False: _____ The human will, on its own, can never desire salvation apart from a work of grace.
5. True or False: _____ The New Birth is a sovereign act of God in which the sinner is entirely passive, until his nature has been renewed, enabling him to respond correctly.
6. The myth that we have been refuting in this chapter is called _____.
7. The correct definition of grace becomes clear when we realize man's _____.
8. True or False: _____ Salvation is a co-operative work between God and man.
9. What are a couple of the benefits that a Christian obtains through understanding the doctrine of Total Human Inability?
 - A. _____
 - B. _____
10. What happened to Adam's will when he fell into sin? _____
11. The guilt of Adam's sin is attributed to _____.
12. Which of the following sentences is the most correct according to our understanding of the fall of Adam?
 - A. We sin because we are sinners.
 - B. We are sinners because we sin.
13. Which of the following faculties of human nature determine what he is going to decide?
 - A. His Will
 - B. His nature/heart
 - C. His blood
14. Which of the following sentences is correct?

- A. The heart governs the will.
- B. The will governs the heart.

15. True or False: _____ The sinner is spiritually sick, but not spiritually dead.
16. Those who reject the doctrine of Total Human Inability are confused with regard to the difference between the _____ to choose, and the _____.
17. (Mark the correct answer): The phrase freedom to choose means:
- A. The sinner has the power to choose the good.
 - B. Elements within his own nature oblige him to choose evil, not because he is obliged by any external force.
 - C. God obliges him to choose evil.
18. Explain in your own words why the verses in the categories below are not valid evidences to show that the will of man is 'free' to choose salvation, apart from the intervention of grace.
- A. Verses showing that man chooses sin.
 - B. Exhortations and commands to choose the good.
 - C. Verses showing that man is responsible for his actions.
19. The biblical basis for human responsibility is _____.

Answers: 1=Moral Free Will; 2=Gospel=V; 3=F; 4=T; 5=T; 6=Free Will; 7=Total Inability; 8=F; 9=A.Destroy pride, B.Gives Security; 10=His entire being became enslaved to sin; 11=His descendants; 12=A; 13=B; 14=A; 15=F; 16=Responsibility, Ability; 17=B; 18=(See text of book) 19=Knowledge

Chapter Three: Justification by Faith

The war-cry of the Reformation, *justification by faith!*, resounded throughout Europe during the 16th Century. Thousands lost their lives rather than renounce this doctrine. War broke out in various countries over it. Why such controversy? Because this doctrine represented a total upheaval in the concept of personal salvation, contrary to everything accepted for centuries.

Toward the end of the 16th Century, something in the Bible astonished a German priest named Martin Luther. It was Paul's declaration in Rom. 1:17 that struck him: *The just shall live by faith*. God illuminated his heart, and Luther understood that merits had nothing to do with salvation.

Astounded by this revelation, he continued his studies in Romans and came to understand the centrality of justification by faith in biblical teaching. This incident contributed to a rediscovery of the theology of the Bible, and the beginnings of the movement known as the Reformation.

Why is this doctrine essential?

First: It frees us from confusion about the basis of our acceptance with God. The moment we realize that God roots our acceptance in the righteousness of Christ alone, rather than our own degree of perfection, we experience a profound relief from unwarranted fear.

Second: We avoid legalism by focusing on righteousness as an inwardly accomplished fact rather than external practices. Performance-based righteousness always leads to legalism.

Third: It helps in prayer. The moment we realize that the answers come because God accepts Christ in us, rather than because of how good we've been lately, then we are free to approach God with greater boldness.

Defining it

Justification is a legal declaration by God that a person is righteous compared with the divine Law, because of the perfect righteousness of Christ, imputed by faith in Christ.

What justification Is not

A doctor once said that the best way to understand what is good health, is to study diseases. The same with doctrine. A good way to grasp the essence of justification is to understand what it is not.

Justification does not refer to the process of spiritual growth in the life of the Christian. ('Sanctification' is the correct term for that.) Justification deals with the issue of our legal relationship with the Father, as compared with his holy Law. A common mistake among Christians in the study of justification is to imagine that justification means *be made righteous*. It means, *declared righteous*, or *vindicated*.⁸

Nor is justification a reward for our faith. As we saw in the previous section on the New Birth, saving faith is a work of divine grace. Although God requires faith as a condition of justification, we must not assume that justification is a reward for our faith. Let us not assume that a consequence is the same as reward.

Neither must we suppose that faith replaces the requirements of God's Moral Law. This Law, (represented by the 10 Commandments), forms part of an eternal covenant and is irreplaceable. Some accused the Reformers of teaching that if we have faith, we need not perform any good works. The reality of the matter is that the works of sinners are not valid for salvation because they proceed from a corrupted source.

So, the WORKS are not accepted if the PERSON is not accepted. The person is accepted only on the basis of the imputed righteousness of Christ, granted through faith alone.

The central idea in justification is how the perfect righteousness of the Law accrues to our account despite our inability to keep the Law. According to the Bible, Christ alone accomplishes this as our substitute under the Law.

Let's use the following questions to clarify the definition above.

Does God require that the righteousness of the law be fulfilled in the Christian?

...that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. Rom. 8:4

Yes. God requires that the righteousness of the Moral Law be fulfilled in us. Here is where some believers get confused. They read verses that affirm that we are not under the Law, and that we cannot be justified by it. From this they draw the illogical conclusion that the Law no longer has value and that God does not require in them the righteousness that it represents.

The Jews fully understood that the Law represented the righteousness of God. So they supposed that justification came by obedience to the Law. They erred because no one can keep it consistently. Paul showed us that the righteousness that the Law represents comes to us by means of faith in Jesus Christ, as a gift from God.

Both we and the Jews agree on one essential point.. God always requires the righteousness of the Law. We differ from the Jews in how we obtain that righteousness. They believe that keeping the Law is the means. We believe that God grants it as a gift, through faith in Christ alone.

Thus, it is essential to understand that the law was never annulled in any sense. It is annulled only as the means of justification. But it remains in effect in another sense. The Law has a defining function. It defines important moralistic terms, such as righteousness, and sin, etc. We note, for example, that 1Jn.3:4 asserts that sin is the transgression of the Law. Logically, the word sin would be meaningless without the Law.

Similarly, Paul says in Rom. 5:13 For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. And therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. Rom. 3:20. The Law is the only standard of righteousness that the Bible recognizes. Without the Law, there would be no sin, and therefore condemnation would be impossible.

The problem with the divine demands of the Law is that nobody can keep them. As Paul said, Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. Rom. 8:7

This brings us to the second question. How does the righteousness of the law become credited to us? Here we touch on a beautiful principle in biblical theology: The substitution of Christ.

Jesus was our substitute under the Law. Christ fulfilled the Law in our place in two senses. First, He lived a perfect life under the Law, fulfilling all its demands. Rom. 3:21-26 Second, Christ accepted in his body the punishment that the Law requires for transgressors, ...death.

Paul develops this theme in Galatians:

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Gal.4:4-5

This clarifies why Paul felt it was unnecessary to invalidate the Law as a condition of salvation. Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law. Rom.3:21 The death of Christ was necessary precisely because the Moral Law is eternal and is always in effect. If it were not so, no one would be counted a sinner and Christ need not have died.

Would the Law be a means of justification if a person were to keep it? Paul answers this with:

For not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; Rom. 2:13.

Key point here! Grace does not consist in a change of the conditions for salvation from something that man cannot do (keep the Law), to something he can do, (believe in Jesus). Faith, as we saw in the previous section, is a gift of God, not something that man

generates out of his own will. The sinner is just as incapable of saving faith as he is of keeping the Law.

Is faith the basis of our justification?

It's a trick question in a way, because technically the answer is NO. Faith is not the basis of our justification. The perfect righteousness of Christ is the basis. Faith is simply the necessary means by which that righteousness is received.

To illustrate, let's consider the process of laying the foundation for a building. The foundation framework represents us. The cement we pour represents the perfect righteousness of Christ. The metal conduit down which the cement is poured represents the faith through which the righteousness comes.

Before the cement arrives, the framework is empty. No foundation exists. The same with us. Without Christ, we are 'empty' of all righteousness. We have nothing to contribute and everything to receive. God himself installs the conduit ...faith. Through this conduit, God pours the 'cement', i.e., the perfect righteousness of Christ, and creates the solid foundation on which we construct our lives.

Sanctification is like the process of building the house once the foundation has been laid. It is a process that continues throughout life. The success of the process varies between believers. (Some trust Christ more than others in building their house.) But justification is not a process. It is a divine act accomplished at the moment of the believer's conversion to Christ. It is neither a process, nor can it ever be repeated. Why? Because the perfect righteousness of Christ can never change.

Sanctification, on the other hand, means, be **made** righteous, or, **be** righteous, or set apart (for holy use).⁹ It involves the daily practice and outworking of righteousness in our life.

As we mull this over, it becomes clearer why some believers feel insecurity concerning their acceptance with God. They confuse the difference between Sanctification and justification. They imagine that their eternal acceptance with God depends on their degree of Sanctification. The result is emotional and spiritual instability because Sanctification is a process that can vary. They know they can lose their sanctification, to one degree or another, and assume therefore that they will lose their acceptance along with it.

Basing our acceptance with God on our degree of sanctification is a formula for trouble. We move immediately into performance-based righteousness, rather than faith-based righteousness. Since our 'performance' is rarely perfect, we open wide the door to doubts, insecurities and a lack of boldness before God and man.

Legalism finds fertile ground in those who base their acceptance with God on their degree of sanctification. To assure themselves that God still approves of them, they must invent rules and regulations by which to measure their performance. (Dress codes; don't go to movies or dances, etc. It is interesting to notice that the rules they invent are always

less stringent than the demands of God's moral laws.) After all, 'faith' is an abstract concept, and difficult to use as an objective measurement of performance. Spiritual failure and emotional instability is virtually guaranteed from this syndrome.

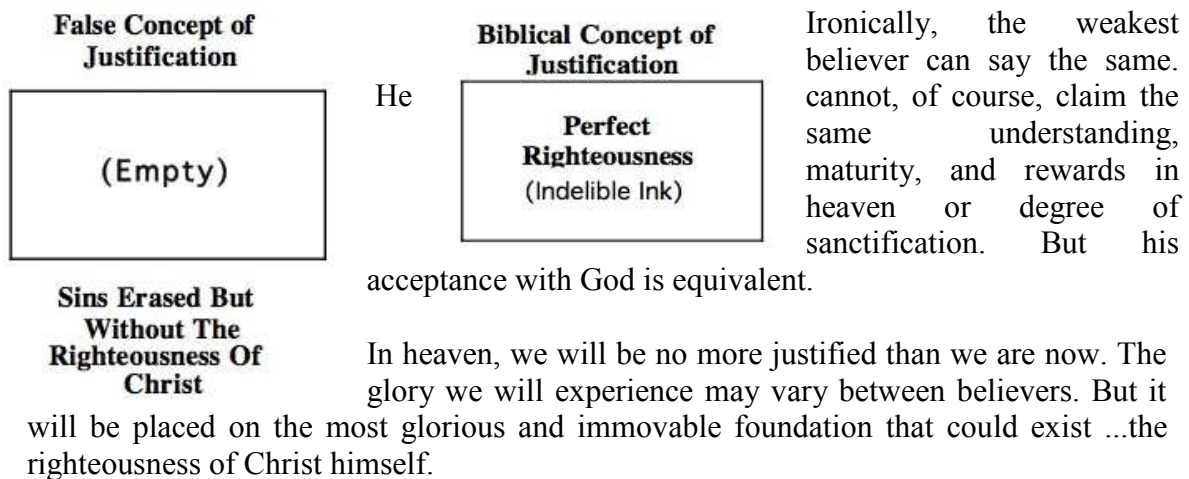
A subtle trap develops out of this. The so-called 'faith' that such believers think they have, is really faith in their ability to be obedient. This is faith in self, not faith in Christ.

Consistent with the teachings of Paul, Dr. Charles Hodges notes the substitution of Christ with these words,

Hence Adam is the type of Christ. As the one is the head and representative of his race, so the other is the head and representative of his people. As the sin of the one is the ground of the condemnation of his posterity, so the righteousness of the other is the ground of the justification of all those who are in him. ¹⁰

Since justification is an absolute, then the great Apostle Paul is no more justified than a new babe in Christ. More sanctified, yes, but not more justified.

A minister friend of the author started a Bible study with these words: There is no one on earth more righteous than I! A lady in the audience exclaimed, How can you say such a proud thing? He explained, I did not say, 'I am more righteous than anyone else'. I only said that there is no one else who is more righteous. I have the perfect righteousness of Christ imputed to me as a free gift. But this is true of every other believer in the world, including you!



The entire Fourth Chapter of Romans illustrates how the perfect righteousness of Christ becomes ours. Paul uses Abraham as the example. Abraham lived more than four hundred years before the Law of Moses. He had no written Law of God. The only thing he had was his conscience and his faith. So Paul comments, Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Rom. 4:3.

However, his faith was not IN PLACE OF righteousness. Faith was the means by which God accomplished the justification. The word for in Greek here is a difficult word to translate. Its meaning is something like, 'with a view to'. It does not mean 'instead of'.

For whom is justification by faith designed?

Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. Rom. 8:30

Justification by faith is reserved for the elect. The eventual glorification of these is as certain as any other part of the chain of events that Paul mentions in this text.

Can a believer lose his justification?

Only if Christ can lose his righteousness.

Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.
Rom. 8:33

God accepts no accusations of sin against his elect and sanctified people, with regard to their eternal destiny. Why not? Because Christ has granted them his righteousness. And the perfect righteousness of Christ never changes. If justification could be lost, it would have to be for another cause than sin.

This makes no sense to the carnal mind because sin is always supposed to result in condemnation. But God has driven a wedge between these two things. The wedge is called justification.

In jurisprudence, a trial cannot take place until the court receives a written accusation. If for some reason the judge does not acknowledge the accusation, then no trial can take place and the prisoner goes free. The judge is under no obligation to say to the prisoner, Oh, what a wonderful person you are! He need not say anything. He is not even making a declaration of 'not guilty'. The judge means only that the accusation is legally inadmissible.

Imagine this scene in heaven. Satan appears and says, God, look at what your kid did! She gossiped. She has a loose tongue. She caused all sorts of problems in the church! God replies, Who do you think you are coming in here and accusing my kids! You are not even a part of the family. I can take care of my own family and do not need your advice to do it. Get out! Satan leaves.

Does that end the story? Not quite. After God slams the door on Satan, He says, Daughter, come here a moment. There is a little matter I'd like to discuss with you.

Right there is the difference between justification and Sanctification. And this difference is hardly theological hairsplitting. It makes the difference between defeat and victory, legalism and freedom, in our relationship to the Father.

We are free to assume the Father is delighted with us until He says otherwise. He is proud of his kids and rejoices over us. He is truly glad to have us in the family.

He will take great delight in you ...he will rejoice over you with singing. Zeph.3:17

Is all this a license to sin?

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Rom. 6:1-2

Paul sees justification as a license to pursue righteousness with a new confidence, looking ahead to his infallible victory. He declares that freedom from sin, and the sincere pursuit of righteous practices, characterizes those justified by faith in Christ alone.

Review Questions: Justification by Faith

1. True or False: _____ God requires that the righteousness of the Law be fulfilled in us.
2. True or False: _____ Faith is the basis of our justification.
3. True or False: _____ God accepts faith in Christ as a substitute for righteousness.
4. True or False: _____ The word justification means, be made righteous.
5. True or False: _____ Justification is something that God accomplishes in us when we accept Christ, and never changes.
6. True or False: _____ Justification is a process.
7. True or False: _____ Sanctification is a process.
8. True or False: _____ Sanctification is merely a theoretical doctrine and has no practical applications in the life of the believer.
9. True or False: _____ Now that we are justified by faith, the Law ceases to have any value.
10. True or False: _____ God's intention was that all of humanity should be justified.
11. The war cry of the Reformation was, _____.
12. The Catholic priest of the 16th Century who discovered in the Bible the doctrine justification by Faith was called, _____.
13. The doctrine of justification by Faith serves to:
 - A. _____
 - B. _____
 - C. _____
14. Christ was our substitute under the Law in two senses: In his _____ and in his _____.
15. True or False: _____ It is possible that a believer lose his justification.
16. True or False: _____ God does not accept accusations against his chosen and justified people.
17. What is the chief characteristic of those who are justified?

Answers: 1=T; 2=F; 3=F; 4=F; 5=T; 6=F; 7=T; 8=F; 9=F; 10=F; 11=Justification By Faith 12=Martin Luther; 13=Freedom from fear; relating to the Father better; avoiding legalism; 14=Life, Death 15=F; 16=T; 17=A righteous life.

Chapter Four: Election by Grace

In a far away city, once upon a time, there lived a famous sculptor of rare qualities. He also practiced martial arts. In both domains he was a superb master.

Unfortunately, several of his friends misunderstood him. Some believed his occupation as a sculptor revealed effeminate traits, delicate and sensitive. Others assumed a karate master would be hard and violent, so they feared him.

One day, he invited his friends to a private party.

Before his guests arrived, the sculptor took a mass of clay and divided it in two parts. He molded one part into a beautiful country scene with people, animals and flowers in a lovely forest. He painted the work and hardened it in a furnace. With the other part, he formed a simple square block and hardened it in the furnace also.

When the friends arrived on the appointed day, he took out the first sculpture, the beautiful forest scene, and set it before them.

‘What a delightful work of art!’ they exclaimed. ‘How delicate and charming! You are such a sensitive artist!’

The master replied, ‘Thank you for your compliments. But I practice another art as well.’

The guests glanced at one another, puzzled by this statement. They watched as the master stepped into his adjoining studio and carried back to the room a big square chunk of hardened clay.

Certain arts do not require the same kind of sensitivity as sculpturing, he said in a serious voice.

The master put the block on the table in the middle of the room and took a short step back from it. He raised his right hand high over his head, and with a powerful cry slammed it down on the block. The hardened clay smashed into pieces, dust flying.

The guests understood. True, the master was gentle and delicate... but also strong and dangerous. It was wise to stay on his good side.

The Lord God is like this artist. Some see him as a loving father who would never harm anyone. Others perceive him as a mighty God who establishes justice, punishes and reproves. Both are correct. The Apostle Paul put it like this:

Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in his goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.
Rom. 11:22

In the story above, the sculpture represents the elect and the block is the reprobate.

Neither the grace of God, nor his righteous judgment could be manifested if there were no sinners. We must therefore love God and fear him also. his mercy and his divine justice are complimentary and interdependent. Like the two sides of a coin called predestination, the one side read selection, and the other, reprobation.

The controversy about election

If some day the reader were struck with the mischievous desire to provoke an argument among Christians, a good way to do it would be to vocalize the word, *predestination*!

For some, this word is a treasure house of comfort that helps them understand God better. For others, it is the worst of slanders on the righteous character of God. The source of the controversy surrounding this word is not found in a lack of biblical data.

In fact, *predestination* is four times easier to prove from Scripture than even the deity of Christ. In the New Testament we have about ten verses that directly express Christ's deity. More than forty declare the doctrine of predestination. Yet the same Christians ready to defend to the death the deity of Christ will fight with equal fury to refute predestination.

We'll see why a little further along. Let's define some terms first.



The meaning of predestination

Predestination means, destined beforehand. It refers to the divine arrangement of circumstances to accomplish his decrees established from before the foundation of the world.

Election refers to the divine decree to create, among lost humanity, certain individuals to be beneficiaries of the free gift of salvation. God did this without reference to merits, the state of the will or foreseen faith in the elect. Yet He did not do this arbitrarily.

God obliges no one to sin. Neither is He the author of the sins of anyone. As for those not elect, He simply allows them to continue in the direction of condemnation they themselves have chosen. In theology, we call this *reprobation*.

Although the concepts of predestination and election are similar, they are not exactly the same. Predestination is the more general term and refers to God's arrangement of reality to accomplish his decrees. Election focuses on the decree to save certain persons in particular.

To illustrate, suppose we want to teach a horse to run in circles. First, we obtain a horse. (This is like election.) Then we construct a circular corral so that he will be obliged to run circles rather than some other pattern. (This is like predestination.) The corral represents the circumstances of life within which we have liberty of action. So, we have liberty in one sense but not in another. God arranges the circumstances of our lives to accomplish his decrees for our lives that He made in eternity.

How important is the doctrine of election?

is like a spotlight that shines on the word ‘grace’. Without this light, grace could be perceived as a reward for human good will. This would be a drastic misunderstanding that could affect our entire walk with God.

If the correct definition of ‘grace’ is ‘unmerited favor’, then grace must be independent of any human contribution. The moment we grasp this concept, it becomes clear that grace and election are inseparable. We must hold to both, or neither. Paul expressed this bond with the words, Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. Rom. 11:5

What is the biblical evidence?

The paradox proofs

Only two arguments exist to refute the doctrine of election: The concept of Justice, and the concept of Foreknowledge.¹¹ Paradoxically, these also constitute the two most powerful arguments in favor of election. They backfire on their proponents. That’s why we call them The Paradox Proofs. Let’s see how this works.

Argument from the concept of justice

Anti-predestinations say, Predestination cannot be true because God would be unjust to choose some and not others. If the will of God is irresistible, how could God hold man responsible for sin?

Paul anticipated this objection in Rom.9:14-16,

What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion. So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. Rom. 9:16

It seems that anti-predestinations forget that Paul anticipated their objection and dealt with it firmly. Moreover, he does so without the slightest apology. In fact, he shows little inclination to even answer the objection thoroughly. He simply re-affirms God’s right to show mercy, or withhold it, according to his good pleasure. He underlines that election does not depend on the human will any more than it does on human works. So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs ... v.16

This seems hardly designed to satisfy the anti-predestinarian. But to make matters worse, he rebukes them for their presumption in asking the question!

You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted his will?’ But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Rom. 9:19-20

Paul answered this objection before it ever came out of the mouth of the first anti-predestinarian. The paradox in this ‘proof’ is right there. If absolute sovereign election were not what Paul were teaching, he would not have anticipated the primary objection to it, nor bothered to rebuke the objectors.

To assert that election is unjust is to back talk at God. Paul seems reluctant to enter into the philosophical details, not because they are unanswerable, but because he understands too well the impossibility of satisfying the pride of men who consider themselves captains of their own fate and masters of their own soul. Since pride, rather than intellectual acumen, is the real basis of the objection, a rebuke is more appropriate than an explanation. Who are you to reply against God?

Nevertheless, God is indeed rational and just. So Paul exposes a hidden illogicality behind the objection: We all merit condemnation. If God were to leave the whole human race in condemnation, He would be doing no injustice to anyone. How then could God be guilty of injustice for saving anybody? Some of us receive mercy. Others receive justice. Nobody receives injustice. Quite right that it does not seem fair. It is more than fair!

The concept of fairness is rooted in the idea of merits. If Johnny gets a piece of cake, then I should get one also. That is only fair. If Joe gets a good attendance award at school, then I deserve one also, if my attendance is equal to his. If the other guy gets something good, then I deserve the same thing under the same terms. Likewise, if God gives salvation to my neighbor, then certainly I deserve the same consideration if I am no worse than he is.

If the reader understood the chapter on total depravity, then by now the absurdity of the above analogies will have flashed on his mind. Within these analogies is the assumption of human dignity. Relative to mundane matters like a piece of cake or an attendance award, the term ‘human dignity’ may have some value. Relative to the holy Law of God, it has no value at all because both my neighbor and I deserve to be thrown forthwith into hell.

Our only appropriate response to the question of election, is to shut our mouths and tremble. God reserves for himself the right to do with his creation as He pleases.

Argument from the concept of foreknowledge

Does God choose some and not others because He sees beforehand their faith and obedience?

Those who answer ‘yes’ to that question base their view on two verses. These are:

Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied. 1Pet. 1:2

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Rom. 8:29

Although at first glance it might appear that these texts defend the ‘foreknowledge’ argument, they actually do the opposite. Here’s why:

It is not saving faith that God could have foreseen because saving faith itself is based on predestination. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. Acts 13:48.¹² If faith itself is produced by grace, then God is the cause of it, and therefore faith is not something passively foreseen by God. ... *those who had believed through grace; Acts 18:27*

On this point Augustine commented, *Man is not converted because he desired it, but because it was ordained to be so by election.*¹³

Neither was it good works that God foresaw. Eph. 2:10 says that the works of God’s people are just as predestinated as those who performed them. No positive quality exists in man for God to foresee.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

In fact, the Greek word translated foreknowledge also means foreordained. In the verses quoted above, obedience is a **result** of foreknowledge and not the **cause** of it. Peter declares, ... *unto obedience* and not *because* of obedience. Paul also expresses in Rom.8:29 to be conformed and not because he saw that they were. Ironically, these two verses serve as support for predestination, rather than as refutations.

It is interesting in 1Peter Chapter One, the Apostle uses this same word, *foreknowledge*, in connection with the coming of Jesus, and is translated foreordained. v.20 It would be ridiculous to say that the Father simply *foreknew* that Jesus was going to come. The same with Acts 2:23, him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; Acts 2:23

When used in relationship to divine activity, the term ‘foreknowledge’ clearly means ‘foreordained’. Rather than refuting the doctrine of predestination, this term supports rather than refutes it. This is a ‘paradox proof’.

Further, no necessary link exists in the Bible between election and any divine foreknowledge about how people are going to react to him. For example, Jesus said,

Woe to you, Corazon! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Matt. 11:21

If these populations would have repented at seeing miracles, why didn't God send a them prophet? The answer: They were not a chosen people.

God chose Israel as his people despite his foreknowledge of their rebellion. But to Israel he says,

All day long I have stretched out My hands To a disobedient and contrary people. Rom. 10:21. Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. Rom. 11:5

When God sent Ezekiel to the Jews, He warned them that they would reject the message. Why did God bother? Because the Jews as a nation were God's chosen people then, according to God's sovereign will, not because He foresaw that they would respond favorably.

But even more peculiar is God's declaration if He had sent Ezekiel to a heathen nation, they would have listened! Why then didn't God do that? Only the doctrine of election explains it.

For you are not sent to a people of unfamiliar speech and of hard language, but to the house of Israel, not to many people of unfamiliar speech and of hard language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, had I sent you to them, they would have listened to you. Ezek. 3:5-6

In 1Cor. 2:7-10, Paul assures us that God has predestined for us a special wisdom, hidden from the rulers of this world. God knew that if this wisdom had been revealed to the rulers of this world, they would not have crucified his Son. Why then did not God reveal it to them? This wisdom is for us, not them.

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love him. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. 1Cor. 2:10

It would be perfectly reasonable for God to base his elective decrees on some positive reaction in man, if man were capable of seeking God. But Rom. 10:20 denies any such ability to fallen man:

I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me. Rom. 10:20

What are we then to think of people who appear to be seeking God? It could be that God is indeed drawing them. This then is a grace of God. Or they may be seeking a god of their own imagination that will accept them on the basis of their own imagined goodness. But in any case, fallen man, without grace, cannot seek for God.

Common sense also excludes divine ‘foreknowledge’ as an explanation of election.

Example: Suppose God foreknew that Mr. John Doe would be born in circumstances that would provoke him to reject Christ. God, being omnipotent, could change those circumstances to predispose him to accept Christ. The inference is inescapable. If God does not change those influences, then it is because Mr. Doe is not elect.

Curiously, both Scripture and reason reveal that the concept of divine foreknowledge supports, rather than refutes, the doctrine of sovereign election.

Three illustrations from Romans Nine

Mystery, mystery, where is the mystery?

Whatever our system of theology, we quickly crash headlong into an inscrutable mystery. This occurs because God has infinite intelligence. Inevitably we can expect him to say or do something that will puzzle us. Paul’s long discourse in Rom. 9-11 ends with,

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! Rom. 11:33

So it’s inevitable that at some point, we do a double take in our studies and wonder if we heard correctly. We encounter a point of mystery. Every system of theology has its ‘point of mystery’.

For those advocating a ‘foreknowledge’ view of election, the point of mystery resides in the question, why did God bother to create those whom He knew would be lost? It seems to answer the ‘fairness’ question, but the idea of immutable sovereign decrees is left out.

The predestinarian may feel smug at this point, until we ask, Why did God choose some and not others? This answers the *sovereignty* question, but leaves the ‘fairness’ issue in the dark.

So if neither side can solve its own particular ‘mystery’ question, how do we decide which is the valid system? Shall we assume neither is knowable with certainty? This would be an easy out if no means existed to decide the issues. However, a means *does* exist. Better still, we can answer the question with certainty.

The solution lies in something more simple than solving the mysteries. It resides in taking a look at where the Bible places the 'point of mystery.' That is where Romans Nine enters the picture. This chapter defines which of the two views is correct by identifying the point of mystery. Let's look at how the text does this.

Paul exposes his arguments via three striking illustrations: Jacob and Esau, Pharaoh, and The Potter and the Clay.

First illustration: Jacob and Esau. v.6-13

Paul insists on two parallel concepts: National election, and individual election. He uses national election to illustrate individual election. It is important to clarify that Paul is not speaking only. From verse 6 to 8, along with 24, the focus of his teaching is on individual election.

For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, In Isaac your seed shall be called. That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. Rom. 9:6-8

He underlines the same point in v.27 by making a distinction between saved Jews and lost ones.

Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, The remnant will be saved. Rom. 9:27

In verse 11, Paul focus on Jacob and Esau to illustrate election:

(for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of him who calls), Rom. 9:11

Jacob and Esau were twins. Yet before they were born, God had already chosen Jacob instead of Esau, without regard to the characteristics foreseen in them.

If God had chosen Jacob because He foresaw in him a heart sensitive to the things of God, the verse would read something like, ...that the purpose of God may remain according to a good heart and not according to him who calls. Paul does everything in his linguistic power to make it clear that election has its ground in God's effectual call, not in any foreseen quality in Jacob. That explains why Paul take the trouble to point out the elective degree was already in place before they were born, without regard to any evil or good they may do.

In verse 11 Paul links divine love with election:

As it is written, 'Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.' Rom. 9:13

God loves by his free elective choice, not because the elect are lovable. His love is a powerful and personal force that drives him to seek, save and preserve his elect. He is the Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep.

His love is active, not passive; personal, not general; voluntary and not forced.

So Jacob and Esau symbolize the elect and the Reprobate. Where, then, does the love of God fit in?

Three basic viewpoints deal with this delicate and complex subject. We'll take a look at all three, and leave it to the reader's discretion to decide which carries the most weight. In theology, we frequently run across issues that have a variety of evidence for more than one view. One of these is the question, who does God love and how much?

Does God love everyone equally? Does he love Adolf Hitler in hell as much as the Apostle John in heaven? Did he love Pharaoh as much as Moses? Is the love of God both universal and equivalent?

A very common view today among Christians is that the love of God is both universal and equivalent.¹⁴ He loves everyone, and to an equal degree. He loves no one more than anyone else. Two snags greet this view. The above text, Rom. 9:13, is the toughest snag. Even if we accept that the love of God is universal, it seems clear that it cannot be equivalent. It seems impossible to make the phrase, *Jacob I have loved and Esau I have hated* to mean that God loved Esau in the same way as He loves Jacob. Even if we grant that *hated* means an inferior kind of love, (as some have suggested), a distinction of some sort remains.

Worse still, the prophet Malachi indicated that the divine 'hatred' toward Esau resulted in the total annihilation of his descendants. Total annihilation seems a rather peculiar way to express affection.

A second snag in the 'universal' view is less obvious, but equally striking once we notice it. Every reference in the Bible to the love of God is associated with his people. A concordance verifies this. Some texts even make a point of linking the love of God to the elect.

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, ...Col. 3:12 knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. 1Th. 1:4

Even the well-known John 3:16 is connected to believers, and therefore does not support the *universal* view. Even if the word 'world' meant 'everybody who ever lived', nothing indicates that the love of God is of the same sort for everyone.¹⁵

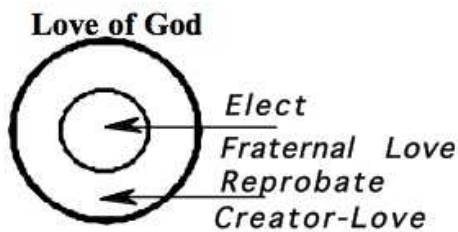
A lady approached the venerable Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon and mentioned that she was bothered by the phrase, *...but Esau have I hated*. Spurgeon answered, That point is not what bothers me, madam. What bothers me is that God was able to love Jacob!

We *must* preach the love of God in a balanced way, by affirming with it the holiness God and the Lordship of Christ. Otherwise, such a proclamation may produce in the mind of the hearer the concept of God as a benign heavenly grandfather who would never harm anyone; whose love is passive and frustrated; who loves everyone in general without loving anyone in particular; an impotent, frustrated deity who hopes in vain that man will respond to his pleadings to love him. Such a concept of God is popular in our epoch because He represents no danger at all.

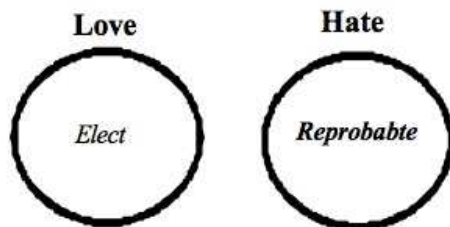
Should we then be surprised why we live in a generation that has lost the fear of God?

Throughout the New Testament, the Apostles preached repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but seemed to reserve the message of love primarily for believers. A few texts on this point are: Ps.5:5; Pr.15:9; Jn.13:1; Jn.14:21,23; Rom. 1:7; Rom.11:28; 2Thes.2:13; Heb.12:5,6; James 2:5

A second viewpoint on God's love affirms that He loves all humanity in his capacity as Creator, but his children in his role as Father. his love extends to all because as Creator because his children are also part of his creation. But his love as Father does not extend to all because not all are his children.



This view is based largely on blessings that God distributes to everyone indiscriminately. These include preservation of the race (1Tim.4:10), rain and harvests, (Matt.5:45), and provision of habitation for the various people groups. (Acts 17:26).¹⁶



This view declares the universality of God's love, but distinguishes between the elect and the Reprobate. The diagram at right expresses this. The third view divides the elect and Reprobate into separate categories: God loves his elect, and hates the Reprobate. It assumes that the illustration of Jacob and Esau must be taken literally. The diagram to the left illustrates this.

Let's focus now on the principle point in Romans Nine, which Paul expresses as, *So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. Rom. 9:16*

Paul introduces a devastating conclusion with the words, So that. This verse excludes both will and works as a basis in man for election. Yet Paul never denies the existence or value of the human will. He simply denies its relevance to the question of election. To Paul, it would be like disputing the quality of a cement foundation for a house, when the house will never be built there anyway.

Second Illustration: Pharaoh v.17-18

Paul now introduces the difficult doctrine of Reprobation, in which God passes by some in his elective decree. If God elects some for salvation, then others exist who are not elect.

But election and Reprobation do not work the same. The ‘rules’ are different. In election, God changes the sinful heart to dispose them to accept Christ. In Reprobation, God changes nothing at all. He simply leaves them in the state that they themselves have chosen, and in which they prefer to remain. No need exists for God to act in any way for these to be Reprobates. They sin quite efficiently without any outside help at all!

Several texts in Exodus indicate that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart. Others say that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Which is right? Both. God hardens the heart of the Reprobate by confronting him with truth. Pharaoh reacted in accord with his own sinful nature and hardened his own heart.



God does no injustice to the Reprobate. He allows them to have what they want most ...their own sins. Their most profound desire is for God to leave them alone and not interrupt their autonomy or their pleasures. This illustrates one of history’s greatest paradoxes: Some receive from God what they least desire, (until God changes their sinful hearts), and will be grateful forever. Others receive what they most desire, and will regret it forever. This is no injustice. It is truly a poetic justice.

Let’s remember that we all merit Pharaoh’s fate. Before Christ found us, we all had the same hard heart. The difference was in God’s mercy, not in any moral superiority in the elect.

Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. Rom. 9:18

Third Illustration: The Potter and the Clay, v.19-22

Some have argued that Paul’s illustration could scarcely refer to an individual human being. People, they say, have a will. Mere vessels of clay have none.

Nevertheless, Paul does not deny that man has a will. He simply rejects the notion that the will of man is the basis of election.

God, the Potter, prepares vessels for dishonor (the Reprobate), as a demonstration of the righteous judgment of God, and vessels of honor (the elect), to express the glory of his grace.

The contrasts are clear: The love and mercy of God toward the elect are eternal; likewise with his holy anger toward the Reprobate. These two groups are at the extremes of eternity and can never be reconciled. Everyone is one vessel or the other, with none in between.

Again, human pride is dashed to the ground, and the truth triumphs: We exist for God's glory and not He for ours.

Ephesians One: The question of causes and effects v.3-11

All our spiritual blessings have their cause in the elective decree of God before the foundation of the world. Thus, election is the cause, and the spiritual blessings the effect. One of these blessings is holiness. *That we should be holy and without blame before him in love, Eph. 1:4*

Paul does not leave us the luxury of reversing this order, nor imagine that foreseen holiness is the cause of our election. Otherwise, we would have to say that God put us in Christ because He foresaw that we would be holy, not because he saw that we were sinners and needed it. We would wind up with another 'Gospel' of merits, rather than of grace alone.

What are these spiritual blessings derived from election, according to the context? Holiness, (v.4); Love of God, (v.5); Adoption, (v.5); Complete Acceptance, (v.6); Redemption by the Blood, (v.7); Wisdom and Spiritual Intelligence (v.8); Knowledge of the will of God, (v.9); Inheritance in heaven, (v.11); Sealed by the Holy Spirit, (v.13).

Several arguments have been proposed to attempt to refute this literal interpretation of Paul's teachings. A common one asserts that the 'election' mentioned in Ephesians simply refers to the divine plan to include gentiles in the offer of salvation, not the election of specific individuals.

The problem with this interpretation is that Paul was not a gentile, yet included himself in the context. He was a Jew, and used the terms 'we' and 'us', in such phrases *awe have obtained an inheritance*. He included himself in the 'plan' of predestination. But in v.13 he says, *in whom you also*. This clearly shows that his thinking was not limited to gentiles specifically until v.13. Between verses 1-12, he could only have meant Christians in general, not gentiles specifically.

The precedence of election

Our salvation is like a multi-faceted diamond ring. The base of the ring is election, and supports the diamond. The base must be prepared beforehand before the jewel can be mounted. Likewise, it is essential that the decree of election precede every aspect of our salvation. Let's look at some of the other facets of salvation, outside of Ephesians One, that demonstrate the precedence of election.

Election precedes saving faith

And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. Acts 13:48

Election precedes good works

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Eph. 2:10

Election precedes the covenant

I have made a covenant with My chosen. Ps.89:3

Election precedes effectual call

Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; Rom. 8:30

Knowledge of our election is a source of inexhaustible joy. Its practical and profound benefits incite us to the praise of the glory of his grace, and produce stability like no other teaching can. Eph.1:6; 2Pet.1:10

How do we know we are elect?

...remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. 1Th. 1:3-4

Paul knew that these brothers were elect because he recognized in them the three cardinal virtues: Faith, Hope and Love. He understood that the development of these qualities characterize the elect.

Though God wants us to have the security of our election, this confidence may not come easily. Diligence in the practice of these virtues is central to this security. We have no right to it merely because we pray a sinner's prayer or perform a so-called 'decision' for Christ. Those are not biblical proofs of election. The Bible always focuses on character. As Peter refers to these virtues, he exhorts,

Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; 2Pet. 1:10

Some unbelievers, by force of carnal will, attain to a certain development in such virtues. Eventually human efforts fail, and the carnal nature will come blasting through. The process of perfection is long-term, and only possible through the power of the Holy Spirit. Persistence in this process is the key characteristic of the elect.

Summary

The doctrine of predestination exposes the central question in redemption. What is man's contribution to his salvation?

Human nature supposes that salvation must be a cooperative work between God and man. God responds to man's efforts by granting grace. If this is correct, then grace is not sovereign. The various false gospels differ as to precisely what it is that man contributes. Some want to contribute good works and penitence. Others respond that the only thing we contribute is faith through our good will, along with the resolve to be obedient to evangelical norms.

How this doctrine benefits us

Self-deception is at work in such ‘gospels’, because both miss the central point: The issue is not *what* we contribute, but whether we contribute anything at all!

Predestination confronts us with our own corrupt nature like no other teaching can. It exposes our total inability and leads us to a glaring confrontation with God’s holy and sovereign nature. It assaults human self-sufficiency mercilessly. It exposes humanism of every brand, both secular and religious. Human pride cannot stand up to an assault like this. Carnal pride, even among the regenerate, *must* oppose the doctrine of predestination, because it cannot bear the demeaning thought that man contributes nothing at all to his own salvation. Pride must choose to be dashed to pieces, or to turn away.

This doctrine is as painful as it is glorious; brutal as it is comforting; bitter as it is sweet. It gives strength in trials, perseverance in persecution, confidence in prayer and security in our relationship with the Father. It puts man in his place. But more importantly, it puts God in *his* place as sovereign.

For the believer, predestination soon becomes more than a doctrine. It draws us into a magnitude of experience where we touch something hidden and profound. We feel eternity in our souls.

Questions About Election

Question 1: In 2Pet.3:9 we read,... not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. 2Pet. 3:9

Does this text contradict the concept of election?

Answer: The context of the verse confirms election, rather than contradict it.

In v.8 we notice that the recipients of Peter's letter are the elect. *But, beloved, The beloved* of God are the elect, according to Col.3:12.

More importantly, to what *promise* is Peter referring in verse 9? The previous verse, (v.10) speaks of the promise of the second coming of Christ and the Day of the Lord. The *promise* here is not the promise of the offer of salvation for all humanity¹⁷, but rather the promise to the Church of Christ about its final liberation.

Peter exhorts Christians troubled about the delay in Christ's return. He reminds them that the delay is for a specific reason. When the body of Christ has been completed with the addition of every last member that is meant to be added, then Christ will return.

Another glaring problem with the above question is this: If God intended to save all, then why not send Christ immediately? Is God unaware that 5 million children are born in the world every day, and that according to statistics, only a small fraction of these will come to salvation?

Therefore, considering both context and logic, the only possible interpretations to the phrase, *...not willing that any should perish*, resides in the divine intention to redeem all the elect, and not humanity in general.

Let's run through 2Pet.3:9 again, with some explanatory comments to clarify it:

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, [*of the second coming of Christ*] as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us [*the elect*], not willing that any [*of the elect*] should perish but that all [*the elect*] should come to repentance.

Question 2: Paul affirms in 1Tim.2:4 that God who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 1Tim. 2:4

Doesn't this suggest that God wants everyone to be saved, and therefore that election and Reprobation are false?

The context of the phrase all men brings to light the correct interpretation:

In verse 1, Paul exhorts Timothy to pray for all men; then in verse 2, he adds that he refers to kings and all those in authority. Paul exhorts Timothy not to limit his prayers to

the poor only, but also to extend his vision to the ruling classes also. We see, in this way, that the phrase all men means all without distinction of classes, not all without exception of person.

The expression all men is repeated hundreds of times in the Scriptures. In fewer than 10 percent of the cases does it mean all of humanity. Normally it means all sorts of people.

Another text that helps us to understand this 'all men' concept, is Titus 2:11. Paul says: *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men*, The message of Christ had not been revealed to the Chinese or to the Aztecs. Paul emphasizes here the universality of the Gospel, which transcends all racial and cultural barriers.

Finally, in v.7, Paul reveals his thoughts on *all men* by saying, *I was appointed a preacher and an apostle... a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth*. In Paul's thinking, *all men* means Gentiles also and not just Jews only.

Question 3: If election is true, why bother to evangelize?

We evangelize because God commanded it. Although God is all powerful, and can use any means He chooses, He has ordained the preaching of his word as the means to save his elect.

Question 4: If election is true, Why pray to God to save souls?

Likewise, if salvation depends on the will of man, why bother to pray to God? Why not erect an altar dedicated to the Will of Man, and pray to it? For if God is waiting passively and impotently in heaven for man to decide, then we are wasting our time to pray to him.

As with the preaching of his word, so God uses prayer as a means to accomplish his purposes. He gives us the privilege of participating in those purposes.

Other evidence

Although the Bible is the story of God's elective decrees, the limitations of this study prevent a detailed analysis of all the texts on election.

We recommend that the student avoid a common error in the study of this theme: Getting lost in the details and forgetting the overall pattern of the Bible as a whole. The pattern is simple: God, by his sovereign will, chose a people for salvation, without taking into account their merits. God instituted a covenant of grace for them, provided a blood sacrifice to confirm and guarantee the preservation of the participants. The order of events is clear: Election, covenant, sacrifice, preservation. Any other order is a mistake.

Other texts on election are:

Jn.13:18; Mc.13:20; Rom.11:5; 1Cor.1:27-28; Tim.1:1; I Tes.1:4; 2 Thes. 2:13; 2 Tim.1:9

Review Questions: Election

1. Election is controversial because: (Mark One)
 - A. Not much evidence exists in the Bible to support it.
 - B. Human pride rebels against it.
 - C. This doctrine dishonors God.
2. Predestination means: _____.
3. Election means: _____.
4. True or False: _____ The words predestination and election are similar but not exactly the same.
5. True or False: _____ Those who deny the doctrine of election do not understand correctly the meaning of the word 'grace'.
6. The two paradox proofs are:
 - A. _____
 - B. _____
7. In what text does Paul anticipate the objection based on the concept of justice?
8. The only correct doctrine concerning election is that it tempts man to say, _____.
9. Paul answered the objection based on the concept of justice by: (Mark One)
 - A. An apologetic attitude in the fact of the objection.
 - B. Answering the objection by a detailed explanation.
 - C. Affirming the right of God to do with what belongs to him, without explanations or apology to anyone.
10. To suggest that God is unjust in his decrees of election is no less than _____.
11. In election, some receive _____, others receive _____, but no one receives _____.
12. The word foreknowledge means _____.
13. There are three things that just don't count as the causes of election, because they also are works of grace in man. These are:
 - A. _____
 - B. _____
 - C. _____

14. When the Scriptures use the word 'foreknowledge' in reference to God's activities, then it can only mean _____.

15. True or False: _____ In the Scriptures, there exists a clear relationship between election, and the way in which God foresees that people will respond.

16. To support the idea of 'foreknowledge' as refutation of the doctrine of election, it is necessary to deny one of two important attributes of God. These are:

- A. _____
- B. _____

Questions on Romans Nine

17. Romans Nine contains three illustrations on election. These are:

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____

18. True or False: _____ In the first illustration, Paul speaks only of personal election, not national election also.

19. Some say that in Romans Nine, Paul is speaking of national election only and not about personal election. Some refutations of this are:

- A. _____
- B. _____

20. Jacob and Esau are symbols, respectively, of the _____ and the _____.

21. True or False: _____ God chose Jacob rather than Esau because He saw beforehand that Jacob had a good heart.

22. True or False: _____ God has a special, private love for the elect that He does not have for humanity in general.

23. The love of God is _____ and not _____.

24. The most important verse in Romans 9 to show that election has no basis in the will of man is _____

25. In the second illustration, that of Pharaoh, the doctrine of _____ is revealed.

26. Explain in your own words why election and Reprobation do not work exactly in the same way.

27. True or False: _____ In the third illustration, Paul denies categorically that man has a will.

28. The Reprobate exists to demonstrate _____. The elect exists to demonstrate _____.

29. True or False: _____ God's primary concern is the welfare of mankind.

Questions relative to Ephesians One

30. All spiritual blessings belong to us because: (Mark One)

- A. God chose us before the foundation of the world.
- B. God foresaw us beforehand as being in Christ.
- C. We are evangelicals.

31. Some of the spiritual benefits belonging to the elect are: _____

32. Two of the anti-predestinarian arguments, in the face of Ephesians One are:

- A. _____
- B. _____

33. True or False: _____ The phrase chosen in Christ means, chosen because we were in Christ.

Questions on Reprobation

34. True or False: _____ The doctrine of Reprobation is agreeable to man.

35. To Reprobate a person, God must: (Mark One)

- A. Oblige the person to sin, whether the person wants to sin or not.
- B. Tempt the sinner.
- C. Act in accord with the sinful choices that the sinner himself desires to make.

36. True or False: _____ God does no injustice to the Reprobate in condemning them.

37. True or False: _____ God is completely passive in Reprobation.

38. God hardens the hearts of the Reprobate by: (Mark One)

- A. Hiding from them the truth of the Gospel.
- B. Presenting them the truth, letting them act in accord with their own sinful natures.
- C. Simply ignoring them.

39. True or False: _____ God gives the gift of faith to all.

40. True or False: _____ God always works for the salvation of everyone.

Answers: 1=B; 2=Foreordained 3=Divine decree to chose some for salvation; 4=V; 5=V; 6=Objection on the grounds of concept of justice and objection on the grounds of foreknowledge 7=Romans Chap.9; 8= That is not fair!; 9=C; 10=Arguing with God; 11=Mercy, justice, injustice 12=Know beforehand 13=A,Faith,B.Good works,C.Good will; 14=Fore-ordained; 15=F; 16=Omniscient; 17=Jacob & Esau; Pharaoh; Potter & Clay; 18=F; 19=A.Nations are made up of individuals. B. The context refers to individuals 20=Elect, Reprobate 21=F; 22=V; 23=Particular, universal; 24=v.16; 25=Reprobation=See text ; 27=F; 28=God's justice, God's mercy 29=F; 30=A; 31=Holiness, Love, Adoption, Redemption, Sealed (See Eph.One); 32=A. Refers to the Plan of God to include the gentiles; They claim that the phrase in Christ means that God foresees that we were going to accept Christ; 33=F; 34=F; 35=C; 36=V; 37=F; 38=B; 39=F; 40=F

Chapter Five: Sacrifice Of Christ

In the previous chapter we saw that God divides humanity into two camps: the elect and the Reprobate. We saw that the Reprobate serve to demonstrate the righteous judgment of God. The question we must now consider is whether God sent Jesus to save Reprobates.

The answer is obvious. God is too wise to send Christ to save those whom He did not elect.

Before proceeding we must clarify a misunderstanding: The sufficiency of the cross for all mankind has never been questioned among Christians. The sacrifice of Christ contains enough virtue and power to save a whole universe of sinners. It could even save the devil and all his demons... if that had been the intention of the Father. Whether or not an individual is savable depends on the *intentions* of the Father, not on his *ability*. The cross is unlimited in saving power.

Yet clearly a limitation of *some* sort exists at *some* point, since not all are saved. Defining our terms will help clarify where the point of limitation is located.

Definition

The death of Jesus guarantees the salvation of all the elect. He fulfilled all the conditions in such a way that man contributes nothing to that sacrifice. Even the necessary conditions of salvation such as faith, obedience, repentance and perseverance were provided for in that moment of death.

The faith and obedience of the elect is born out of the cross, not out of the free will of man. God owes no thanks to the elect for their obedience. Quite the reverse. They owe it all to the cross.

So when we preach about the completed work of Christ, we mean that the cross accomplished all the purposes for which it occurred; no more and no less. It was not a partially failed enterprise. In theology, we use the term 'efficacious' to describe this concept.

If we say that a hammer is 'efficacious', it is understood that it can drive nails into a board. If we say that a detective is 'efficacious', we mean that he is good at catching crooks. Logically, we cannot say that a thing is efficacious if fails to fulfill its purpose.

Other terms for this doctrine are *particular redemption*, or *limited atonement*. These express that the Father sent Jesus with the precise mission of saving certain individuals in particular, and not with the intention of saving all of humanity in general. The opposite of this teaching is called Universal Atonement. We will use these terms interchangeably. ¹⁸

Essentially, if any of those for whom Christ died could perish, then we would need to stop calling the cross 'efficacious'.

So, this issue deals with two inseparable questions: First, What effect did his sacrifice have on those for whom He died? If we answer this one clearly, then we already have the answer to the second question, which is, For whom did Christ die?

Why is this question important?

It is central to the stability of our walk with God. If the faith and the obedience of the elect are ultimately attributable to their own human will, rather than the efficacy of the cross, then Christ is a partial Savior only and deserves only a part of the glory. We would again have a performance-based relationship with God, rather than one grounded in a work completed by God himself.

Every false religion in the world, and every distorted version of the Christian gospel says, **do!** The true one says, **done!**

The biblical evidence

Particular redemption in the Gospel of John

Before the Reformation, those who taught that Christ came to save the elect were sometimes called Johannian Scholars, because they based much of their thinking on the Gospel of John. The term Augustinian was also used because St. Augustine in the Fifth Century was one of the first theologians to teach the doctrines of grace systematically. These scholars taught that the correct doctrine regarding Redemption could be deduced from the following considerations:

1. Christ came to accomplish the will of the Father, (6:38)
2. The will of the Father was to save only those He gave to Christ, (6:39)
3. Christ accomplished with complete success the work the Father had given him to do, (17:4).

The logical conclusion is that Christ came to save the elect, not the entire world, and that He accomplished this task with complete success. He did not come to save the whole world and then return to heaven having succeeded only in part.

Of sheep and goats: John Chapter 10

In this chapter, Jesus revealed that he came to give his life for *the sheep* ...*I lay down My life for the sheep.* v.15

A man stood up in church to give a testimony. He explained how the Lord had changed him from a goat to a sheep. His intentions were very good, but the illustration had a defect: Goats never change into sheep, nor sheep into goats. Different species! A lot can happen to sheep. They can get lost, get dirty, be robbed, injured or killed. But they can never change into goats.



He Came To Save
His Sheep

John Chapter 10 illustrates both the limitation and the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice. He perceives the sheep as his own before He even came to save them. *I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.* v.10 They were his, but with a defect ...they were dead. They needed resurrecting.

Second, Christ transferred his life to the sheep via his sacrifice for them. *The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep.* v.11 Notice He never said, I came to give my life for both sheep and goats.

Nevertheless, the sheep are under the obligation to *believe*, right? Naturally! But faith is not the reason they are sheep. They receive the gift of saving faith because they are sheep. This kind of faith is therefore a *result* rather than a *cause*. Notice v.26:

... But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep ...

Let's take a careful look at this verse. Jesus does not teach here that we are sheep because we believed. He says we believe because we are sheep.

In reference to the cross, J.I.Packer underlines this with,

Its saving power does not depend on faith being added to it; its saving power is such that faith flows from it. 19

Finally, the sheep receive eternal life, v.28. They do not become sheep by the act of receiving eternal life because they were already sheep.

What determines that some become sheep and others not? Their own faith or free will? No. They are sheep because of an elective decree of the Father. The work done in them is because they were given to Jesus, who never fails.

Those the Father gave him

Jesus repeats through out the Gospel of John the phrase, those whom the Father has given to me, and answers the central question, as to the Father's saving intentions.

Let's open our Bibles and follow an analysis of Jn. 6:37-45,65.

First, we belonged to God the Father by a divine decree before we belonged to Christ. *All that the Father gives Me will come to Me* v.37

This phrase, *those whom the father has given to me, is* the key to understanding the entire Gospel of John. God gave certain people to Christ as gifts, in order to save them. He did not send the Savior to save whom He could, but to save those the Father gave him.

Second, those the Father gave him will come to him. How do they come? The Father will draw them, v.44. The idea of coming to Christ will not be something generated out of their own initiative, because they are incapable of doing that. The Father plants the idea in them and through the revelation of Christ, makes them willing to come. v. 44

Third, the will of the Father is the determining factor in everything. Christ knows that the Father will accomplish his purposes. In v.39 Christ indicated the content of the Father's

will. *This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.* It is impossible that any perish of those whom Father gave to Christ, because an irresistible will undertakes to accomplish a salvation via an infallible Savior.

In similar terms, Packer exclaims, *Christ did not win a hypothetical salvation for hypothetical believers, a mere possibility of salvation for any who might possibly believe, but a real salvation for his own chosen people.* ²⁰

A good summary of this entire concept is found in v.44 and it merits special attention. It contains, in one form or another, all the doctrines of grace we have studied up to this point.

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

In one brilliant statement, Jesus declares the following teachings:

1. That unsaved people are totally incapable of choosing Christ by their own initiative. (Total Inability)
2. That the power of the Father alone brings people to Christ and He alone conquers the natural resistance of the sinner. (Effectual Call)
3. That the Father saves infallibly all whom He draws, and preserves them until the resurrection of the just. (sovereign Regeneration and Security of the elect) ²¹

Analysis of John 17

This High Priestly prayer by Jesus reveals the intentions of the Father in sending him to earth. What precisely were those intentions? Did Christ fulfill them in part, or totally?

v.2 - Christ has power over all flesh. This shows that human flesh is unable to resist his will. According to the will of the Father, Christ gives eternal life to those the Father has given to him. This chapter repeats seven times the key phrase, *those you gave me*.

v.4- Christ completed the work the Father gave him. Some believers have asked, Why didn't Christ save the entire world? If this had been the work that the Father had committed to him, he would have accomplished it.

v.6- Christ revealed the Father only to those the Father had given him.

v.9 - If Christ came to save the entire world, why didn't He pray for the world? Yet He refused to pray for the entire world. He prayed for the elect only.

v.11- Christ pleaded that the Father would preserve those the Father had given him. Does the Father answer the prayers of Jesus? See John 11:41

v.12 - None of those whom Christ keeps are lost. He keeps those whom the Father gives to him. Was he referring to the twelve disciples only? See v.20

Kept from evil (v.15), sanctified (v.17), sent into the world (v.18), united with God the Father (v.21), God's glory is in them (v.22), they will be with Christ forever (v.24)

v.23- Notice the private and particular love of God for the elect. The Father loves the elect, just as He loves his only Son.

v.24- Christ prays so that his own may be with him forever, i.e., those the Father has given him.

If we believe that the intercessory ministry of Christ is effectual, then the elect receive infallibly all these benefits for which Christ prayed.

Summary of particular redemption in John's Gospel

We are gifts of the Father to Christ. God sent Jesus to secure the salvation of those the Father gave him. Christ provided a sure redemption by his death on the cross and his ministry of intercession as High Priest.

By his irresistible power, the Father draws the elect to Christ. He regenerates them and preserves them infallibly for his glory.

A glorious impossibility: Rom.8:32-34

Paul declares, without the slightest ambiguity, the impossibility that any for whom Christ died could be lost. Why? Because the cross was truly effective.

He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall He not with him also freely give us all things? 33 Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Rom.8:32-34

According to v.32, the benefits of the sacrifice of Christ invariably reach those for whom He gave his life. The phrase, *us all* refers in context to all believers. It means those who are predestinated, called and justified, (v.30) who receive God's favor (v.31), the elect (v.33), who are not condemned (v.34), whom God loves and preserves. (v.35-39)

In v.33, Paul shows that God accepts no accusations against his elect and justified people, because Christ died for them.

In v.34, it is impossible that any of those be condemned for whom Christ died, resurrected, and for whom He intercedes.

In this text we see that the doctrine of particular redemption is not a philosophical fantasy, nor the fruit of theological reasoning. Paul expounds it with the utmost clarity.

The covenant of grace: The foundation of the Bible

Imagine ourselves standing in front of a house with the blueprint in hand. The house is lovely, with a logical structure. Everything is functional and normal.

Strangely, the house does not correspond to the blueprint. The windows are different. The door is on the wrong side. Obviously the blueprint is for another house.

The New Testament fulfills the Old Testament blueprint of divine redemption. We can study redemption from two angles: By noting the pattern of Old Testament history, we can predict the sort of redemption we see in the New Testament. Or, by studying the New Testament, we could predict the general nature of Old Testament history.

Suppose biblical redemption were as follows: God intended to save everyone. So He sent Christ to die on the cross with the intention of saving them all. This created a covenant of grace for everyone, which they could enter by their free will. Upon believing, they would enter the covenant where they would have salvation guaranteed, if they continued contributing their good will and evangelical obedience.

Is this biblical redemption? If this is a valid possibility, then we ought to read in the Old Testament the following scenario:

God loved all nations and wanted to enter into covenant with them. So He sacrificed a lamb for all the nations so that they could enter into it via their free will. Then He sent prophets throughout the world, to the Romans, Chinese, Aztecs, etc., inviting them to enter his covenant. But the only people that wanted to enter, was a good-natured people, known for their generosity and obedience to God and rather good-looking, too. These were the 'Jews'.

Is this the plan of redemption we see typified in the Old Testament?

We notice that all nations were lost in idolatry and depravity. Nevertheless, God chose a people by pure sovereign election. These were the Jews. He did this because of his grace alone, not because of merits or obedience foreseen in them. God entered into covenant with them. To ratify this covenant, He instituted a lamb sacrifice. The lamb was intended for them only, not for any other nation. By this sacrifice, God made this elect people acceptable to himself.

By this scenario, we can deduce the kind of redemption story that should be found in the New Testament. God has a people chosen by grace, without consideration of merits foreseen in them. God entered into covenant with his elect, and sent Christ to confirm it by the sacrifice of himself. Thus, God saved all his elect.

Which of these two scenarios is biblical? Notice the clear order of events: First, God chose a people. He then made an eternal covenant with them. Finally, He provided a sacrifice to confirm it, and sanctify his people. Since the cross of Christ confirmed the

covenant made with the elect, it follows that the sacrifice was intended for the elect in particular, and them only.

Election, covenant, sacrifice. This is biblical redemption.

Does Christ confirm the covenant for some, or for all?

For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. Matt.26:28

Many does not mean all. The blood of Jesus was the *blood of the new covenant*. If the elect alone participate in the covenant, and if Christ poured out his blood to confirm the covenant, then Christ died with the intent of saving the elect alone.

...how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? 15 And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. Heb.9:14-15

Christ is the mediator of the New Covenant for those called to it. (Note here the idea of Effectual Call.) His blood cleanses the conscience of these alone, and they receive the promise of an eternal inheritance. Both the power and the limitation involved in his sacrifice are expressed here rather clearly. He died to guarantee the cleansing of all those called to an eternal inheritance.

The intercession of Christ as our High Priest

The ministry of the Jewish priest involved two activities: First, offering sacrifices for the sins of the people. Second, interceding for them on the basis of the sacrifice offered.

An inseparable link existed, therefore, between the sacrifice offered and the persons for whom the priest interceded. He never interceded for anyone without first offering a sacrifice for him.

Suppose we could transport ourselves to a time about twenty-eight hundred years ago and enter the temple of Jerusalem to watch the rituals performed. We notice a priest cutting the throat of a lamb in front of the altar. We ask him, Priest, why are you killing this lamb? The priest answers, Because I must approach the altar to intercede for a family that has sinned. The Lord will not allow me approach without the blood of the lamb. Immediately we understand that the lamb was sacrificed for this family.

Suppose that we return the next day, but arrive late. The priest has already sacrificed the lamb and entered the temple to pray. We ask, For whom was this lamb sacrificed? It looks like we'll never know because the priest has already entered the temple. Promptly, one of us suggests, If we could hear the priest praying, we could deduce for whom the

lamb was sacrificed. Quickly, we run around to the back of tabernacle and put our ears to the wall. We hear the priest saying, Lord, forgive the sins of the Josiah family, and have mercy on them. Now we know for whom the lamb was slain, because we know that the priest intercedes only for those for whom the sacrifice was made.

How does this relate to the ministry of our High Priest Jesus Christ? Let's go listen again at the back wall. This time, we are not listening to a human priest, but to Christ himself in his intercessory ministry.

I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. Jn. 17:9

If Christ died with the intention of saving all, then why isn't He praying for all? If He intercedes for some, it can only be because his sacrifice was intended for them alone.

Jesus, as our High Priest, performs both functions of the priesthood: Sacrifice and Intercession. Like the Priests of old, he fulfills these functions for the covenant people, and them alone.

Thus, we read:

The Lord has sworn And will not relent, 'You are a priest forever ...by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant. Heb.7:21-22

Summary of Evidence

Theological reasoning is not the only evidence available to prove the particular nature of Christ's sacrifice. The Scriptures declare it clearly that Christ came to save:

His people ... *and you shall call his name Jesus, for He will save his people from their sins. Matt. 1:21.*

His sheep: ... *and I lay down my life for the sheep. Jn. 10:15*

His church: ... *the church of God which He has purchased with his own blood. Acts 20:28*

His elect: *Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Rom.8:32-33.*

Those who participate In his covenant: ... *He is the mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, ...that those who are called might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. Heb.9:15*

Those for whom Christ intercedes: *I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given me out of the world for they are yours. Jn.17:9.*

Those the Father gave to Christ: *Of those whom you gave Me I have lost none. Jn18:9*

Logical evidence

Since we know that some will be saved, and others not, it follows that a limitation some sort of exists relative to the sacrifice of Christ. Otherwise, all would be saved.

All Evangelical Christians believe, therefore, in limited Atonement. We differ on the question of exactly *how* it is limited. The limitation could only involve one of two domains: Either the cross is limited in its *power*, or it is limited in its *intention*.

If we say it is limited in its *power*, then we declare that there is only enough power to save a limited number. (We can discard this option right away in the face of many texts expressing the power of the cross.) If it is limited in its *intention*, then it was designed to save certain people, although it may have the power to redeem more.

The key question, though, is whether the cross depends on some cooperation from man to make it efficacious. We have already seen that man contributes nothing at all to his salvation. Even the exercise of his faith and free will is the result of divine grace.

This forces us to a conclusion: The efficacy of the cross depends on itself alone, not on the cooperative actions of man. We cannot have it both ways. If the power of the cross depends on the cooperative work of man, then it is not a *completed* sacrifice. Conversely, if the cross is truly *effective*, then it will produce the requisite cooperative actions in those for whom it is intended.

If the benefits of the cross come infallibly to those for whom Christ was given, then it was for them alone. This sacrifice is worthy of trust because it guarantees a complete work of sanctification.

How should the message of the cross be preached?

For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 1Cor.2:2

A dilemma presents itself for those who come to understand the doctrine of the Efficacious sacrifice of Christ. They feel restricted upon saying to an unbeliever, Christ died for you. And they are right. In one sense, this is restrictive. If we cannot say this, what then *should* we say?

J.I. Packer, notes this tension:

We want (rightly) to proclaim Christ as Savior; yet we end up saying that Christ, having made salvation possible, has left us to become our own saviors. It comes about in this way. We want to magnify the saving grace of God and the saving power of Christ. So we declare that God's redeeming love extends to every man,

and that Christ has died to save every man, and we proclaim that the glory of divine mercy is to be measured by these facts. And then, in order to avoid universalism, we have to depreciate all that we were previously extolling, and to explain that, after all, nothing that God and Christ have done can save us unless we add something to it; the decisive factor which actually saves us is our own believing. What we say comes to this- that Christ saves us with our help; and what that means, when one thinks it out is this- that we save ourselves with Christ's help. This a hollow anticlimax. 22

The answer to this tension is a beautiful paradox. The purpose of a clearer understanding of the cross is not to limit our preaching, but to free us to focus better on the saving *power* of the cross. This should have been our focus all along.

We tell people that the cross saves *completely* and *surely* all who trust in Jesus.

We have in the cross a sure salvation, a sovereign Savior Who saves to the end, and initiates reconciliation with an infinitely holy God. He pardons all our sins and incorporates us into an eternal covenant, via a cross that preserves us forever. This is what the Apostles preached.

On the other hand, the doctrine of Universal Atonement contains serious contradictions that can provoke a thoughtful person to reject the gospel. First, if Christ died with the intention of saving all, then He accomplished little more than a mere fraction of his intention. In this case, He is largely a failed Savior. Worse, he cannot save *me* unless I help him by cooperating with my free will and evangelical obedience. This translates ultimately into saving oneself with a bit of help from a 'Savior who could only give it a shot and hope for the best. Why bother to trust in a Savior like that?

Second, it is a little contradictory to preach a powerful cross if it is man, not God, who makes it work.

Third, it is difficult to preach a sovereign God unless He is able to fulfill his intentions. He could hardly be worshiped as wise if He undertook a purpose that He himself never intended to complete.

Finally, no such thing as security of salvation could exist for anyone, unless the gift of perseverance were a benefit purchased in the cross. This would make salvation a Gospel of merits. That is precisely what Universal Atonement leads to.

An intelligent unbeliever, upon hearing that Christ died to save all, but that few will be saved, would conclude instantly that he is not hearing about a sovereign Savior. He would understand that such a cross has no power to save or preserve anybody. Fortunately, most are not so thoughtful. By God's grace, ironically, they skip the contradictions in modern preaching.

When we preach the cross, let's declare a totally efficacious Savior. His cross guarantees a sure salvation for every believer. It is the certainty of a future perfection. We can explain that the final words of Jesus, *It is finished*, mean a complete salvation to which nothing can be added. All is of grace.

Questions on the sacrifice of Christ

Question 1: The concept of propitiation for the whole world is apparently proclaimed in *I Jn. 2:2* *And He himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world*. Doesn't this refute the idea of a sacrifice limited to the elect?

Answer: This verse is considered the bulwark of the doctrine of Universal Atonement. It explains, supposedly, that the death of Christ expiates not only the sins of Christians, but also those of all the lost. It is said that the word *our* refers to all Christians and the word *the whole world* refers to all the lost.

Whether this interpretation is correct depends on the common sense rules of biblical interpretation. Two rules in particular apply here: Context and ordinary word usage.

First, let's give a clear definition of the key words used. What does the word propitiation mean? It signifies appease wrath. The New Testament uses it five times to show that the wrath of God is appeased regarding sin. According to *I Jn. 2:2*, the wrath of God is appeased with respect to somebody. It is now necessary to deduce who those persons are from the context.

Let's assume that God's wrath is appeased for everyone in the entire world. What then of the hundreds of verses that announce the wrath of God toward sinners? What of the book of Revelation, which depicts his wrath to be poured out on the whole world? The cross apparently did not appease the wrath of God toward the entire world, because otherwise nobody would be condemned.

The word 'propitiation' in *Rom. 3:25* expresses appeasement only for those justified by faith in Christ.

In *I Jn. 2:2*, the Apostle declares that God's wrath is appeased toward those brothers to whom he is writing, and toward all other believers throughout the world. If God is angry with no one, then we are forced to the conclusion that all are saved.

Second, who are the brothers to whom John is writing? This Epistle is directed to Jewish Christians. We read in *v. 2:7* of a divine commandment that the hearers had received 'from the beginning'. Only Jews, not gentiles, had received commandments from God.

The Book of Acts reveals that first-century Jewish Christians tended to forget that the gentile believers were just as accepted in Christ as they. Their Jewish background led them to feel superior. John, in this Epistle, tells them that Christ died for the scattered brethren in the whole world, just as for believing Jews.

Below is a study of the words, world and whole world, to show that they do not normally mean all of humanity.

- A. Believers in the world: Lu.2:1; Jn.12:19.
- B. Unbelievers in the world: Jn.15:18; 16:20; 17:14; 2Ped.2:5; IJn.5:19; Rev.10; 13:3; 16:14.
- C. The Universe: Acts :24
- D. People of all ethnic groups in the world: Jn.1:29; Jn.1:10
- E. The general public: Jn.7:4; 12:19; 14:22

Out of the 105 times that John uses the word world in his writings, in only 11 cases can it mean every human being. Even in those 11 cases, such an interpretation is doubtful. The basic rule for interpreting biblical words is this: The meaning of a word is determined by its most frequent usage, unless the context shows the need for another meaning.

Question 2: Certain texts use the word all, in reference to the sacrifice of Christ. Examples: 1Tim.2:4-6 *who desires all men to be saved and to come to 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, ...*

Others texts are: Heb.2:9 & 2Cor.5:14-15. How does this correspond with the idea of limited atonement for the elect?

Answer: We have already affirmed the hypothetical sufficiency of the cross for all mankind. The only point we have denied is that the divine intention in sending Christ was to save all. Nevertheless, it is easy to show that the phrase, all and all men, in these texts, does not mean all humanity without exception of person. Let us focus principally on 1Tim.2:4,6, because the same arguments that apply to this text, apply to similar ones also:

The word all men in this context means all without distinction of *class or race*, not all without exception of *person*. The context, along with a brief study of this phrase throughout the Bible, confirms this.

This phrase all men appears hundreds of times in the Bible. In less than 10% of the cases can it mean every person that has ever existed. Normally it means all sorts of people.

One example is Titus 2:11, *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men ...*

At the time Paul wrote this, the grace of God had not been manifested to everyone in the world. Is Paul exaggerating? No. He is simply saying that the Gospel is universal, and that it transcends the limits of culture and race. God has elect people among the nations also, not only among the Jews.

Another example is Acts 2:17-*I will pour out my Spirit on all ...* In the day of Pentecost, only a few people received the Spirit. People of all *kinds* are mentioned here, without distinctions of ages or social standing.

Is there something in 1Timothy that would lead us to ignore 90% of the biblical evidence concerning the use of the phrase all men? The context shows narrow limitations as to 1Tim.2:4,6.

Notice v.1&2: *...prayers ...for kings and all who are in authority* ...Paul mentions specifically the civil authorities. The gospel must be preached even to pagan rulers, and prayer offered for them, because God may have elect even among them. In v.7, Paul shows that he has in mind the gentiles also when he says, all men.

The message of Chapter 2 is that God wishes to save people of all kinds, gentiles also, not just Jews ...rulers also, not just the poor.

Nothing in this text, therefore, teaches Universal Atonement.

Below follows a brief study on the biblical usage of the terms 'All and All men.

- A. All believers: 3Jn.12; Acts 17:31; Acts 2:45; 1Cor.7:7; Rom.16:19.
- B. All unbelievers: Lu.21:17; Apoc.19:18; 2Tim.4:16
- C. People of every class: (i.e., people without exception of class, but not without exception of person.) Mk.1:37; Lu.3:15; Jn.3:26; 13:35; Acts 2:17; 21:28; 2Co.3:2; 2Tim.4:16; Tim.2:11
- D. Everyone present: Mk.5:20; Acts 4:21; 20:19; 20:26

Question 3: If limited atonement is the correct doctrine, then isn't God insincere in offering salvation to all based on the sacrifice of Jesus?

Answer: We have clearly asserted that the cross of Christ is sufficient to save any number of sinners. Therefore, on the grounds of this sufficiency, it is not contradictory for God to offer salvation to all.

Speaking hypothetically, would God forgive a Reprobate on the grounds of Christ's sacrifice, were he to come to Christ. Yes! The *sufficiency* of the cross shows that the barrier in coming to Christ resides entirely in himself. God never built a wall between himself and any man. The wall is in man's own nature, not God's.

Further, the question above contains a hidden presupposition that deserves careful examination.

The assumption is that the Gospel is *primarily* an offer of salvation. We heartily agree that it is an *offer*. We may, however, question if the offer is the foremost consideration.

Let's look at a common element in the Gospel as preached by prominent biblical figures:

Repent, and believe in the gospel Mark 1:15.

...and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. Luke 24:47

Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, ... Acts 3:19

Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, Acts 17:30

...testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Acts 20:21

What is central in these verses? Repentance! Now let's ask, if Christ never came and died for anybody at all, would God still require repentance?

Absolutely! God's holiness must be vindicated above all. In the creature-Creator relationship, rebellious subjects owe repentance despite any other considerations.

The call to repentance is inherent in the Gospel. Therefore, it makes sense to offer the Gospel to all mankind. Inherent in this call is the assumption that God will accept the repentance of any sinner. Why a Reprobate does not give that repentance is another subject. To show that God is insincere in offering the Gospel to all mankind, it would be necessary to prove that God would not accept such repentance. Nothing in the doctrine of limited atonement suggests this.

Review Questions: Sacrifice of Christ

1. True or False: _____ The death of Christ accomplished all the conditions of salvation for the elect, except faith and obedience.
2. Other names for our doctrine are _____ or _____.
3. Universal Atonement means that Christ died for: (Mark One)
 - A. The elect only
 - B. All of humanity
4. Limited Atonement means that Christ died for: (Mark One)
 - A. The elect only
 - B. All of humanity
5. Explain in your own words why this doctrine is important.

6. True or False: _____ Conversion to Christ means that God changes goats to sheep.

7. Christ came to give his life for the _____, according to John 10.
8. How does Christ transfer his life to the sheep? _____
9. True or False: _____ A believer's faith is a *result* of being a sheep, not the *cause* of being a sheep.
10. True or False: _____ We make ourselves the Lord's sheep by receiving eternal life.
11. We become the Lord's sheep by: (Mark One)
A. A decision of our free will.
B. By our faith in Christ.
C. By an eternal decree of God the Father in giving us to Christ.
12. The key phrase for understanding the Gospel of John is _____.
13. True or False: _____ We belong to God the Father by a divine decree before belonging to Christ.
14. An analysis of Jn.6:37-45,65 revealed to us certain important truths. These are:
A. _____
B. _____
C. _____
15. How many of the doctrines of grace are proven by Jn.6:44?
16. In which chapter of the Bible is found the High-priestly prayer of Christ before He went to the cross? _____
17. According to John 17, to whom does Christ give eternal life? _____
18. Christ accomplished: (Choose one)
A. All the work the Father gave him to do.
B. Part of the work the Father gave him to do.
C. Whatever he could, according to the ability of man to the cooperation he could get from people.
19. When Christ said that he preserves all those the Father has given to him, He is talking about: (Choose one)
A. The twelve disciples only.
B. Believers of all epochs of history.
C. Those who keep themselves faithful by the power of their free will.
20. The great impossibility that Paul expresses in Rom. 8:32-34 consists in that _____.

21. In Rom.8:33, Paul shows that God does not receive accusations against his elect and justified people because: (Choose one)

- A. God only justifies those whom He knows beforehand are going to be faithful.
- B. Christ died for them.
- C. They are worthy.

22. True or False: _____ Our doctrine is the product of theological reasoning only and not because they are clearly expressed in the Bible.

23. The biblical pattern of Redemption follows three specific steps in the two Testaments. These are: _____

24. For whom is Christ Mediator of the new covenant according to Heb.9: 14-15?

25. The two aspects of Christ's sacerdotal ministry, along with the Jewish priests in the Old Testament are:

- A. _____
- B. _____

26. True or False: _____ As a faithful High Priest, Christ intercedes only for those for whom He made sacrifice.

27. True or False: _____ Christ interceded for the salvation of the world.

28. Fill in the following blanks:

- A. According to Matt.1:21, Christ died for _____.
- B. According to Jn.10:15, Christ died for _____.
- C. According to Ef.5:25, Christ died for _____.
- D. According to Heb.9:15 Christ died for _____.
- E. According to Jn.17:9 Christ intercedes for _____.

29. The logical conclusion of the doctrine of universal atonement, if it were true, is that
_____.

30. If all humanity is not going to be saved, then we must conclude that the cross had one of two limitations: (Choose one)

- A. Limited in its effectiveness.
- B. Limited in the extent of its intention.

31. The word 'propitiation' means _____.

32. The correct interpretation of I Jn.2:2 is: (Choose one)
- A. Christ appeased the wrath of God toward all of humanity.
 - B. Christ appeased the wrath of God toward all believers through the whole world.
 - C. Christ did not appease the wrath of God toward anyone.
33. True or False: _____ The word world, the whole world in the Bible, normally refers to the entire human race.
34. In the Bible, the words all and all men, normally mean:
- A. Every human being that has existed.
 - B. Every kind of human being.
 - C. All gentiles but not all Jews.
35. True or False: _____ The doctrine of universal atonement contains more limitations than the doctrine of limited atonement.

Answers: 1=F; 2=Particular Redemption; Universal Atonement; 3=B; 4=A; 5=See text; 6=F; 7=Sheep; 8=Gave his life for them; 9=T; 10=F; 11=C; 12=Those the Father has given Me; 13=T; 14=First, we belong to God by divine decree before belonging to Christ; Second, all those that the Father gave to him, will come to Christ; Third, the will of God determines everything; 15=Total Human Inability; Effectual Call; Sovereign Regeneration; Security of the elect; 16=Cap.17; 17=Those the Father gave him; 18=A; 19=B; 20=Those for whom Christ died could be condemned; 21=B; 22=F; 23=Election, covenant, sacrifice; 24=The Called; 25=A.Sacrifice B.Intercession; 26=T; 27=F; 28=A.His people, B.The sheep, C.His Church, D.The Called E.Those the Father gave him; 29=All will be saved; 30=B; 31=Appease wrath; 32=B; 33=F; 34=B; 35=T

Chapter Six: Unity and Universality of the Church

Which is the true church? We hear this question occasionally when we testify about Christ. Some churches declare themselves the only true one, outside of which salvation is impossible. Cults tend to do this.

The Bible reveals something surprising about this issue. The church that Christ founded is an invisible organism, not a visible organization. Its structure is spiritual, not material. So, being a member of a religious organization of any kind is no guarantee that one belongs to Christ's church. Conversely, it is possible to be a member of a local church that does not belong to Christ at all.



All this can appear confusing until we analyze what we mean by the Unity and Universality of the Church.

Who belongs to this church?

The Church of Christ consists of all those saved by faith in Christ. In Acts 2:47 we read, *And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.* So it is plain that all only those saved are part of the Church of Christ. In 1Cor.1: 2, we read,

To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:

According to this text, God's church consists of people who are sanctified in Christ, called by God to a holy life, pray in the name of the Lord Jesus, and recognize his Lordship. This is distinct from an occasional attendance at meetings, along with a few religious practices.

Viewing it this way, we can say without hesitation, that some members of Christ's body belong to churches that are not biblical. Others may attend true churches that preach the Gospel, without belonging to Christ at all. Not all who participate in meetings are necessarily regenerate. Some participate by custom or culture, without ever finding the Lord.

Jesus clarified in John 17 that those who belong to him have eternal life (v.2), know God (v.3), receive God's Words, (v.8), are hated by the world (v.16), are sanctified (v.17), and are united in love (v.21-23). These alone will be with him in glory.

The universal character of the Church is seen in the words of Jesus in John 10: 16: *And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.* The Jews believed that they alone were objects of salvation.

Here, Jesus reveals that he has other sheep besides those present, but they form one sheepfold only. His sheep have faith in him, (v.26), hear his voice (v.27), and follow him (v.27). The Father preserves them unfailingly, so that none are lost (v.28-29).

Organization or organism?

And He himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; Eph. 4:11-12

Further, the Church of Christ has officials. These are Apostles, Prophets (Preachers), Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers. (v.11) Their job is to prepare Christians to minister to humanity, to unite believers in the faith, and bring them into a deeper knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. (v.12-13) (Interestingly, Paul mentions nothing of Popes, Cardinals, or priests as officials of his Church.)

Though Christ's Church has officials, it would be a mistake to suppose that is principally an organization. The following verses express a supremely important truth: His Church is primarily an organism, not an organization. It is a 'body', of which Christ is the head... *him who is the head Christ ...* v.15-16 No one but Christ has the right to take to himself the title of 'head' of the Church.

What should the Body of Christ look like on the local scene?

In a legal sense, God perceives the Universal Church as united in Christ, justified and acceptable before the Father.

Nevertheless, the Body of Christ has visible manifestations as local churches. All these lack perfection to some degree. Some have such serious defects in doctrine and organization that we might ask ourselves if they qualify as legitimate expressions of our Lord's church. Although we would like to avoid a spirit of criticism, it is necessary to have clear criteria to help us distinguish between legitimate churches and false ones.

The word of God gives us such criteria, and we are going to study it now. Though some churches may be more mature than others, all should strive for the biblical ideal if they wish to be considered as a legitimate part of the Body of Christ.

We have organized these criteria below according to four divisions to simplify their study: Purity of doctrine, of organization, of behavior, and of worship.

Purity of doctrine

Doctrinal differences on minor points will always exist among Christians. These include the mode of baptism, the best way to hold services, etc. However, certain doctrines are central to Biblical thought, and therefore essential. A denial of any of these is grounds for declaring a church doctrinally impure, without the right to call itself a part of the Body of Christ.

These essential doctrines are: The infallibility of the Bible as the word of God, and as sufficient for all questions of doctrine and practice; the Holy Trinity; the Deity of Christ, his virgin birth, his death and bodily resurrection and his second coming; Salvation by grace without merits; eternal judgment for sinners and eternal felicity for believers.²³

If a Christian finds himself in a church that denies any of these doctrines, he should separate from it immediately. Though 'good' people may attend it, God disapproves of it because it denies essential truths revealed in his word.

Purity of Organization

A legitimate body of believers recognizes Jesus Christ as the only Head of the universal church. It rejects all authorities, whether civil or religious, who claim the right to govern all Christians on earth.

It practices a plurality of elders. (Acts 14:23 & Tit. 1:5) The elders are spiritual leaders of the church, such as pastors, evangelists and missionaries. (Eph.4: 11-12). These govern with authority, but are not authoritarian. (I Pet. 5:1-3) They pastor the church and take care of it spiritually. (Acts 20:28) One man alone must not govern the church as dictator or supreme authority. Those who rule *anything* without accountability are normally abusive. Such a church is profoundly impure in the organizational sense.²⁴

Final authority in the church resides with the elders, not with the congregation. The kingdom of God is not a democracy. God governs it through the elders and not by congregational voting. The elder is God's agent, not the congregation. (Acts. 20:28; I Thes.5:12-13; Heb.13:17).

The local church has no authority to decide for itself what is sound doctrine. Church Councils resolve theological difficulties. These consist of all the elders and missionaries associated with the same organization of churches. Such Councils then impose the decrees on the local churches. (Acts 15:1-31 & 16:4)

Biblical example

In the first-century controversy over circumcision, it is important to note what the early Christians did **not** do: They did not write to some ecclesiastical authority to decree what is correct. Nor did they leave it to each congregation to decide for itself whatever appeared convenient. Nor did they decide that truth is merely a matter of personal conscience, nor that each Christian has the right to his own opinion. A certain amount of liberty of conscience on minor issues is acceptable. On major matters, such as those touching on the means of salvation, the early Christians handed down decrees based on the deliberations of the Council of elders. (Acts 15)

In the daily life of the Church, the elders labor in doctrine and teaching, maintaining the standards of sound doctrine. Controversial questions that cannot be resolved by the creeds of the church become the prerogative of the Council of elders.

Although some evangelical churches lack organizational purity, this is insufficient reason to separate. Some have received no instruction about biblical government, but serve the Lord with a sincere heart. Organizational questions are less important than doctrinal or moral ones. If, though, the conduct of the leaders is authoritarian to the point that the spiritual development of the believer is hindered, then it may be legitimate to search for another church. Similarly, if the leaders fail to exercise biblical discipline to the point that impurity runs rampant in the church, then it may be time to separate.

Purity of Testimony

A Biblical church exercises moral discipline. The elders counsel members who persist in serious sin, or place them under discipline according to the case. Those who refuse the counsel of the elders and persist in sin, must be excommunicated. The biblical church must not have a bad reputation in the community as tolerant of serious sin. (Eph.5:13)

The Biblical church practices separation from the world. Legitimate churches have no fellowship nor cooperation with religious organizations which fail to maintain sound doctrine or which practice idolatry.

Unity without truth is nothing more than an ungodly union. (2Cor.6:14-18)

A Biblical church does not practice legalism. It preaches righteousness based on faith in Christ alone, not in exterior matters such as clothing, types of food or sabbath observances. (Gal.3: 1-6; Col.2:16)

A legitimate church evangelizes. It is contradictory for a church to consider itself normal, if it does not fulfill one of the major purposes for its existence. The Great Commission of Jesus in Matt. 28:19 expresses that purpose. *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...*

Purity of Worship

The word of God must be preached and taught faithfully, not social activism, nor political theories, nor human philosophies nor private opinions. (2Tim.4:1-2)

The ordinances of Baptism and Lord's Supper are administered faithfully, and not neglected. (Acts 2:42)

Order exists in the services. Noise and disorder are not found there. (1Cor.14:23,40)

Note: New churches are in the process of development, and have lacked the time to develop these points. This is tolerable. However, those that previously knew the truth, but have veered from biblical standards, are without excuse.

The Corinthian church was carnal, out of order and immoral. Nevertheless, Paul called it 'The Church of God'. Why did he do this when the church was in such a deplorable condition? He knew they were 'babes' in Christ, and lacked teaching. They had come out

of a pagan culture, and lacked understanding. Would it have been legitimate for a believer to separate from such a church? No. It is better to remain and help the membership move toward maturity. Withdrawal is justified only if the church refuses to progress toward godly standards.

Important questions about the church

Are denominations legitimate?

This question is double-sided. Division among Christians is a clear sign of carnality and spiritual immaturity. In a certain sense, denominationalism contributes to division by tempting Christians to adopt exclusivist attitudes. Some imagine that their denomination is spiritually superior to all others. They feel sorry for Christians who belong to other denominations, and their conscience bothers them little if they steal ‘sheep’ from legitimate churches.

Yet denominations have played a profoundly beneficial role. With false cults proliferating, it seems reasonable for a group of churches to associate to maintain their purity. Moreover, a Presbytery could hardly exist, nor a council of churches, unless a denomination exists first. The idea of presbyteries and councils is biblical. (1Tim.4:14 & Acts Chapter 15). If the best way to maintain a biblical system of government is through a denomination, then it is perfectly legitimate.

Who has the right to exercise discipline in the church?

The spiritual leaders fulfill this function according to Gal.6:1

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

What are legitimate reasons for excommunication?

Provoking divisions, Tit.3:10; Heresy, Rom.16:17; Persistence in serious sin, ICor.5:9-13

Summary

The true church of Christ is a living organism, formed by all those saved by faith in Jesus Christ. He alone is Head of church. The essential nature of the church is supernatural, not of human origin.

In its local expression, the church of Christ exhibits purity in doctrine, organization, behavior and worship.

Review Questions: Unity and universality of the Church

1. True or False: _____ The Church of Christ as no kind of organization.
2. True or False: _____ The Church of Christ is primarily an organism and not an organization.

3. True or False: _____ The Church of Christ has one Head, the Pope.
4. True or False: _____ Those who are saved, and those only, are part of the universal Church of Christ.
5. True or False: _____ It is entirely possible that some Catholics are part of the Body of Christ, while some Evangelicals are not.
6. True or False: _____ The church of Christ, in the universal sense, is a visible organism.
7. True or False: _____ The church of Christ is principally a spiritual entity, not a terrestrial one.
8. True or False: _____ Being a member of a local church that preaches the Bible guarantees personal salvation.
9. True or False: _____ All churches that call themselves 'Christian' are legitimate expressions of the universal body of Christ.
10. True or False: _____ Legitimate churches always fulfill all the biblical criteria mentioned in this study.
12. True or False: _____ To be correctly organized, a local church must have plurality of elders.
13. True or False: _____ Elders means the elderly gentlemen of the church.
14. True or False: _____ The Presbytery consists in all the elders of all the churches associated in a region or city.
15. True or False: _____ The Council (or Presbytery) consists of all the elders who belong to a body of associated churches.
16. True or False: _____ A member in good standing in a local church, although not an elder, may vote in Council or Presbytery meetings.
17. True or False: _____ According to the democratic ideal of the Bible, a local congregation has the authority to decide for itself what is sound doctrine.
18. True or False: _____ If a local church is not perfectly organized, the Christian has the right to separate from it immediately.
19. True or False: _____ It is right for churches to participate in ecumenical movements with churches that do not maintain sound doctrine, to display a spirit of tolerance.

20. True or False: _____ In our epoch, it is proper that the pulpit may be used for social activism.

Answers 1=F; 2=T; 3=F; 4=T; 5=T; 6=F; 7=T; 8=F; 9=F; 10=F; 11=doctrine, Organization, Testimony, Worship; 12=T; 13=F; 14=T; 15=T; 16=F; 17=F; 18=F; 19=F; 20=F

Chapter Seven: Preservation

Mr. Jones lived a life of unabashed perversity until the day he attended an evangelistic meeting. There he responded to the invitation to accept Christ and make a public profession of faith. During the following months he dutifully attended the discipleship meetings, read the Bible and showed definite improvements in his conduct.

One day he turned up drunk on the street. During the following weeks, various Christians tried to help him, but he refused all counsel. He returned to his old ways and vehemently denied the Gospel. He remained in this state for several years and afterwards died.

Did Mr. Jones go to heaven or hell?

For generations, Christians have discussed this vital issue: Can a Christian lose his salvation?

In the 16th century, a certain religious party raised this question and insisted that a born-again Christian could lose his salvation by persisting in serious sins or apostatizing from the faith. They would affirm that Mr. Jones is in hell.²⁵

Others rejected this view and said that such Christians would go to heaven despite their apostasy, because they were once born again.²⁶

The first party said that their doctrine was necessary to put the fear of God into Christians, because otherwise they would have a license to sin. Others insisted that only a doctrine of absolute security could avoid contaminating the Gospel with a philosophy of salvation by merits.

Fortunately, the two viewpoints above are not the only options. Another exists, clearly taught by the Reformers. (The other two views are really perversions of the original Reformation teaching.) This doctrine is called the Perseverance and Preservation of the elect.²⁷

A definition of the doctrine of preservation is as follows:

God has an elect and justified people that He preserves from a life of sin, and from ultimately apostatizing from the faith so as to lose their salvation. He accomplishes this by his grace, through the Holy Spirit, his word, punishments, threats, exhortations, and by planting his love and his fear in their hearts.

Let's notice that this definition differs radically in important points from the other two views.

First, our preservation is linked intimately with two other important doctrines, election and justification.

Second, the doctrine asserts that certain conditions exist by which a Christian would lose his salvation if he were to fulfill them. These are: Living a life of sin, and/or apostatizing from the faith. In this sense, preservation agrees with the first party ...at least hypothetically. It differs in that God preserves his people from apostatizing, since the basis of preservation is the cross, not human effort.

Third, the doctrine affirms that the elect do not lose their salvation. In this sense it agrees with the second view, but differs in two important particulars: It denies the possibility that God would allow an elect person to apostatize ultimately and finally. It also grounds the preservation in the doctrines of election and justification, rather than in the idea of being born-again. This, again, takes the preservation out of the domain of human abilities, and puts it into the dimension of God's decrees.

Finally, though preservation may be a gift of grace, it operates by practical means which have to do with Christian living as a whole.

Ironically, the other two viewpoints, while seeming exact opposites, have something crucial in common: Both are rooted in something that man thinks or does.

Misunderstandings are easy at this point. To clarify, let's see precisely what the doctrine of preservation does **not** mean.

We are **not** teaching the doctrine of preservation is a license to sin. This would involve us in a contradiction because God preserves his people from acting in such a manner. The ground of our security of salvation is God's ability to preserve us from conditions that might result in losing our salvation.

Nor does the doctrine affirm that Christians are alleviated from the responsibility to apply the necessary means for their own preservation. God knows how to make life uncomfortable for negligent believers.

Nor does preservation mean that God deprives his people of their freedom of will. We affirm that God's people can apostatize if they wish. How God employs means to ensure that they will never wish to do so is the subject of the next section.

The biblical evidence

If election is true, then preservation must be true. To be chosen from eternity implies that God will use whatever means necessary to ensure that the elect attain the goal for which He created them. Although the logic involved is sufficient verification, nevertheless, the Scriptures themselves portray it by associating election with preservation in many New Testament texts:

1. Our glorification is the final fruit of predestination in Rom.8:30.

And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. Rom. 8:30

2. John greets the elect lady in 2Jn.1-2 and then declares that the truth will be with us forever

3. According to Jude 1, the called *are sanctified in God the Father and preserved in Jesus Christ.*

4. The good works of the elect are just as predestinated as the elect themselves. We must never forget this in any discussion of preservation. Notice Eph. 2:10:

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

5. Also, Isaiah observed that all the good deeds that the people of God do, are works that God has done in them.

Is. 26:12 -LORD, You will establish peace for us, For You have also done all our works in us.

If the good works of the elect are predestined by the Lord himself, how could they do works that would condemn them?

If justification is true, so is preservation. Here, the imputation of the righteousness of Christ plays a vital role. If the righteousness of Christ is apart from merits, then our demerits cannot be a cause of its removal. If it is not our righteousness to start with, then neither is it ours to change. Our degree of sanctification may change, but not our justification. The latter is grounded in a divine decree, not in a merit of man.

No such thing is found in the Bible as a doctrine of de-justification. Never does the Bible teach that a justified person can return to an unjustified state.

That is why Paul says that God does not accept accusations against his elect and justified people.

Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Rom.8:32

Does God simply ignore the sins of his people? No! He knows how to chastise us. In Romans Chapter Eight, Paul refers to final condemnation. The first verse of the chapter introduces the principle theme, There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Paul never teaches that Christians cannot sin ...only that sin has ceased to be a cause of condemnation for the Christian.

The remainder of Romans Eight is a description of what the elect are like. They do not live according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. They have the inward testimony of the Spirit, with no desire to live a life of sin.

Let's be absolutely clear on this point: Paul is not stating conditions here, as though he were saying do these things and you will be saved. If so, he would be contradicting himself since he just finished seven chapters showing why salvation is by grace alone.

Chapter Six of Romans emphasizes the same. Paul points out the impossibility of sinful living now that we are dead to sin through justification.

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Rom. 6:1-2

In the three previous chapters, Paul explained how justification works. Then in Chapter 6, he explains how justified people really live.

Sin no longer reigns over them because they are dead to it. They are slaves to righteousness. How then could they fail to persevere?

A line of logic frequently pops up in discussions of preservation. It goes like this:

- Serious sin brings condemnation.
- Some Christians commit serious sin.
- Some Christians are therefore condemned.

Rather convincing at first glance. But it fails for several reasons. First, The Bible never teaches that only serious sins cause condemnation. All sin deserves condemnation. To be consistent with the above logic, therefore, we would have to say that all Christians are condemned, since all sin daily.

Yet a more serious error lurks in the above logic in that it ignores justification. The entire purpose of justification is to throw up a barrier between sin and condemnation. If justification failed in this, there would be no point in being justified. Christ imputes his righteousness to the believer precisely to form this impenetrable barricade between sin and condemnation.

So the first premise is weak. Sin does not always result in condemnation. For God's elect, it never brings condemnation, because God accepts NO accusations against them.

Does this give Christians a license to sin? No, it gives them a license to struggle toward sanctification without the dread of an austere Heavenly Father threatening to leave them if they fail to perform adequately.

Genuine Christians never want a license to sin anyway. According to the Bible, the news of their security causes them to want to persevere. This, ironically, is one of the signs of their election.

And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as He is pure. 1John 3:3

Every one of the doctrines of grace imply preservation

- If God is sovereign, and all things exist because of his immutable will, then none of his intentions can be frustrated, including the salvation of his elect.
- If we are totally unable to save ourselves, then likewise, we are unable to preserve ourselves. God does both.
- If the sacrifice of Christ is truly efficacious, and none of those for whom He died can perish, then his people will be preserved. How much more so, if Jesus intercedes for them as their High Priest? Is He not the surety and mediator of a new covenant made for them?
- The elect are united with the Body of Christ. He cuts off none of his own members.
- Our sanctification and effectual calling are linked with our preservation, according to Jude:

Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ:

Plain texts as evidence

And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen! 2Tim. 4:18

...who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 1Pe 1:5

We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him. 1Jn 5:18

Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ: Jude 1

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, Jude 24,

He preserves the souls of his saints ...Ps.97:10

Evidence from biblical logic

Any other doctrine than preservation results in a gospel of salvation based on the will and works of man. The basic problem with other views is that they presuppose that salvation is a cooperative work between God and man.

The Bible urges Christians to attain a security in their salvation. This makes sense only if preservation is true. 2Pet. 1:10; Heb.6:11,19; 10:22; 1Jn.5:13

The Scriptures speak of the seal of the Holy Spirit believers receive. This seal is until the day of redemption. (Eph. 1:13; 2Co.1:22. What value would such a seal have if it can be broken?

God's faithfulness is the basis our obedience, not human ability. He promises to confirm us as faithful to the end so that we will be without reproach and preserve us from the evil one.

...who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1Co. 1:8

But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one. 2Th. 3:3

God's power keeps us.

...who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 1Pet. 1:5.

We can have complete confidence that God will complete in us the good work that He began.

...being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; Phil. 1:6

The will of the Father is the final word in preservation. He wills that none of those He has given to Jesus may perish.

This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. Jn. 6:39

Jesus confirmed and guaranteed this by declaring that none of these has perished.

that the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke, Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none. Jn.18:9

The immutable will of the Father is the ground of our consolation.

Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. Heb. 6:17-18

Since the elect cannot be deceived, they will not apostatize.

For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. Matt. 24:24

Our preservation is no less certain than the efficacy of Christ's intercession for his people.

Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. Heb. 7:25

Christ prays that our faith may not fail, and that the Father will preserve his own.
But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren. Lk. 22:32 Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. Jn. 17:11

The doctrine of sanctification implies preservation because our final sanctification is guaranteed.

By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. Heb. 10:10,14

God promises our entire sanctification.

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it. 1Th. 5:23 -24

If a Christian were to live a life of sin, would he go to heaven anyway?

That is the crucial question when a discussion of preservation arises. Let's lay out several other questions of the same sort to make expose the nature of the question above:

- What does a square circle look like?
- What is the color blue when it is green?
- If a sinner were perfect, would he be saved?

All these questions are in the same category, including the one about Christians living a life of sin. They make no sense because they are self-contradictory. The idea of a lost saint is as absurd as a perfect sinner or a square circle.

Remember Mr. Jones at the beginning of this chapter who was born-again and lived a life of sin? One view says he is in hell. Another view says he is in heaven. The Biblical view says he never existed.

No answers exist for illogical questions. (This is a fundamental law of logic.) The only proper reply to the question, above is, stop talking self-contradictory nonsense!

Nothing could be clearer on this point than I Jn. 3:9:

Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for his seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.

According to John's theology, whoever is born of God cannot practice a life of sin. We know, of course, that this does not mean temporary lapses or single instances of sin.²⁸ After all, John made it clear that anyone claiming to have no sin is a liar. However, we have the Lord Jesus Christ as our Advocate whenever we fall into sin.

John explains **why** the regenerate do not practice sin. Jesus preserves them.

We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him. 1Jn. 5:18

Biblical writers sometimes employ a teaching device called hypothesis contrary to fact. Jesus himself used this tactic when he said, *And if I say, 'I do not know him, ' I shall be a liar like you; but I do know him and keep his word. Jn. 8:55* Under the condition stated, Jesus would have been a liar. A mere hypothetical condition could not make that a reality.

The Apostle Paul used a similar example in Rom.2:13, while discussing justification by the Law. He makes it clear that if anyone were to keep the law, he would be justified.

(for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified;)

Did Paul really believe that people exist who had been justified that way? Certainly not. Throughout Romans, we learn that no one keeps the law, and therefore it justifies no one. Paul speaks hypothetically to illustrate a spiritual principle.

The question about the fate of the soul of a sinful believer is in the same category. Hypothetically speaking, we could say he would go to hell. But this is a hypothesis only and has no existence in reality, because God preserves his people.

In practice, how do genuine believers react when they hear about preservation? Do they take it as a license to sin? What does John say?

And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as He is pure. 1Jn. 3:3

This good news leads believers to want to purify themselves. This is the answer for those who fear that preservation is a license to sin.

Are there people who try to take advantage of the grace of God and use preservation as a pretext to sin? Yes, Jude 4 describes such people:

For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Those who attempt to take advantage of the doctrine of preservation in order to live in corruption prove themselves to be reprobates.

How does God preserve his people?

One of the most frequent objections against preservation is based on biblical exhortations to persevere. Supposedly, a command to persevere implies the real possibility of some not persevering, and thus being lost.

Hebrews is replete with warnings against falling away. Threats of imminent condemnation abound for those who apostatize. Since apostasy results in condemnation, this ought to be a real danger for the people of God. Otherwise, the threats are in vain.

The answer to this objection is involved with a paradox expressed in Jer. 32:40:

And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me.

God preserves his covenant people by putting his fear in their hearts. Fear of what? Fear of God himself. Fear of falling.

How does God accomplish this? By means of exhortations, threats, and admonitions. These very things are the means He employs to ensure the faithfulness of his people.

According to above verse, the eternal nature of the covenant makes it impossible for God to stop blessing his people. A key way He blesses them is by putting his fear in them, to ensure that the covenant relationship remains intact.

So, a paradox exists between the responsibility of the believer to obey, versus the divine activity in preservation. God himself guarantees the faithfulness of his elect.

Paul expresses this paradox in Phil.2:12-13:

Therefore, my beloved, as you 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; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for his good pleasure.

In the first part, Paul exhorts the church to work out their own salvation, as though this were up to them.²⁹ But we already know that fallen man is totally unable to promote his own salvation by any effort of will or work. God produces in them the willingness and the ability to obey.

Here's the paradox: Born-again believers can apostatize if they want to. They never want to, though, because God himself gives them better sense.

A good example of the same strategy occurs in evangelism when God threatens eternal condemnation on all those who refuse to repent. Is this threat insincere toward the elect? From the viewpoint of God's eternal decrees to save his elect, it seems so. Nevertheless, God uses this very threat as the means to provoke them to repent. Although repentance

itself is a gift of grace, it comes via this threat. It's no contradiction therefore, to say that repentance is both a responsibility of man and a gift of God.

The doctrine of preservation is similar. God reveals to his people the extreme danger of apostasy, putting his fear in their hearts. The paradox lies in the use of this means to guarantee that the danger will never happen.

In Chapter Two, we learned that the existence of a command to do a thing never proves the ability to do it. The same with exhortations and threats about falling away. A warning against apostasy proves nothing about whether this has happened to any Christian. It is impossible to prove from the Bible that any born-again believer has ever been eternally lost.

So, warnings and exhortations against apostasy never constitute evidence against the doctrine of preservation.

False faith: Religious unregenerate

Big problem: How to distinguish between those born again and those who simply seem to be? Some folks are good actors. Others are sincerely religious and think they are saved.

Let's console ourselves a bit with this fact: The problem is not new. Even the Apostles had this difficulty from time to time. Some people live such a life of consecration to Christ, accompanied by such fruits of the Spirit that doubting them is absurd. Others live in a gray area between light and darkness and we wonder if they are really saved.

The entire epistle of 1John was written to deal with this problem. In it, John emphasizes that he wants us to have a security of our salvation. This would make no sense if a doctrine like preservation were incorrect.

He adds that he wants us to have a fullness of joy in the knowledge of this security. I does not come cheap though. He gives us criteria throughout the book to help us distinguish between true believers and those who fake it.

What are these criteria? How do those born of God really live? According to John, they are in fellowship with God and with the brethren whom they love. They remain faithful to the church. They do not live in sin. They overcome the world by faith. They are generous in helping with the needs of the believers and testify of their faith in Christ to the world.

Having a mouth full of religious words is not one of John's criteria. Jesus himself put it this way:

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' Matt. 7:21-23

Christ will not say, Depart from me you backsliders! He said, I *never* knew you.

The religious people mentioned in this text did two things irrelevant to salvation, and failed to do two things that are relevant. They praised God, saying, Lord! Lord! They prophesied in his name and even did miracles.

However, they neither lived godly lives, nor did the will of the Father. Their faith was phony. Without holy lives, their words and miracles counted for nothing.

Another example of phony faith was Simon the magician. In Acts Chapter Eight, we learn that he believed and was baptized. Later, Peter reproved him because he perceived that his heart was not right in the sight of God. Simon had a type of superficial faith, but not a saving faith. He participated in the religious activities of God's people, even to the point of being baptized. But he was not regenerate.

James devoted part of the second chapter of his epistle to this question of false faith. Even the demons have a kind of 'faith'.³⁰ But it's not a saving faith. Genuine faith results in an obedient life that produces good works, such as the two examples mentioned in the chapter, Abraham and Rehab.

People have religious experiences of all sorts, whether they are saved or not. In churches emphasizing experience over objective truth, this is especially dangerous. Some individuals even have a kind of repentance through which they liberate themselves from various vices. This is the case with the false prophets in 2Pet. 2. The chapter describes how these religious people infiltrate themselves into Christian assemblies and even occupy ministerial offices.

Peter tells us that they escaped the corruption of the world through the knowledge of Christ. Through this intellectual assent, they experienced a measure of deliverance. Yet they are wells without water, born for destruction.

Outwardly, their profession is correct. Inwardly, they have eyes full of adultery. They preach for money, and possess tremendous charm. They speak of freedom, but are slaves of corruption.

Can the regenerate commit serious sin or fall away temporarily?

Absolutely! David fell into adultery and murder. This was a temporary fall, not a lifestyle over the long run. God restored him. A believer committed incest in 1Cor.5. Through church discipline, he was restored.

Yes, Christians fall into sin. Even serious ones. A Christian in such a state may be indistinguishable from the lost. Sometimes only time will tell.

How much assurance should be given to new converts?

Modern evangelical culture has invented a series of repentance rituals that have nothing to do with salvation. Most of these are harmless, as long as no one gets the idea that they have anything to do with salvation. These little rituals include going forward at a meeting, praying a sinner's prayer, raising one's hand in meeting, etc.

Unfortunately, some groups give assurance based on the performance of these acts. Giving such assurance is unscriptural at best, and potentially dangerous, since none of these actions are the basis of salvation. They must never be presented as grounds for assurance of salvation. Doing so not only communicates a false gospel, but may give assurance to an unconverted individual. May we expect God to be pleased with that?

It seems more advisable to proceed as did the Apostles. First, they exhorted them to continue in the faith. Then they taught them in their homes. During the studies, the rationale for a security of salvation became clear.

Some receive assurance immediately from the Holy Spirit. For others, it comes slowly as they perceive God's grace working in their lives.

We may give new converts assurance only when their lives show the characteristics of born-again believers. This is the approach that John took. We must do the same.

Summary

The doctrine of preservation affirms that God has a people He preserves for heaven. Many Bible verses show that this doctrine can sustain itself without need of theological logic. Nevertheless, the theological arguments based on other doctrines would be sufficient to prove it even if such clear texts were absent. Intellectual honesty requires that preservation be given serious consideration.

Opponents to this doctrine invariably imagine that it grants to Christians a license to sin. The objection is self-contradictory, because sincere Christians do not want a license to sin. We have also shown that other views lead to a gospel of salvation by merits.

Preservation is, therefore, a gift of grace granted by God to his elect. The Christian is responsible for applying the means God has provided for his preservation. God himself undertakes to ensure that the elect do just that.

The doctrine of preservation provides inestimable consolation for sincere Christians in their struggle against sin, giving them a substantial basis of security concerning the outcome.

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen. Jude 24-25

Objections

Though we dealt with the main objections in the chapter, certain ones are so common that they merit special treatment.

Heb. 6:1-6

This text is the bulwark of the opponents of preservation. They suppose it refers to backslidden Christians, and shows that these have lost their salvation.

Answer: The most obvious problem with the above interpretation is that it proves more than the objectors intended. In v.4 & 6, we read that those once enlightened cannot be restored to repentance. If the text refers to backslidden Christians, then we must declare it is impossible to restore a backslider. Few who base their views on this text are willing to affirm that. We all know Christians who have fallen away and later been restored. The Bible itself mentions examples. This alone is sufficient grounds to suspect that this text does not refer to backslidden Christians.

Objectors often give three reasons why they believe that Heb.6:1-6 refers to Christians:

First, they claim that the doctrines mentioned here are uniquely Christian. Second, that the spiritual experiences mentioned are distinctive to Christians, i.e., repentance, illumination by the Holy Spirit, and tasting of the powers to come. Third, the phrase *crucify again for themselves the Son of God* shows a knowledge of the Gospel. These three facts are supposed to be ample evidence that the lost individuals are those who were once born-again.

A careful reading of the entire chapter, along with the previous one, reveals that the above presuppositions are groundless.

First, it is untrue that the doctrines mentioned are uniquely Christian. They are typically Jewish also. The Old Testament teaches them all. Let's remember that Jesus taught nothing essentially new, but simply fulfilled things revealed before. These Judaic doctrines, therefore, were the foundation principles of his ministry.

Since these doctrines were also Jewish, no reason exists for assuming the illumination and tasting of the Spirit must refer to the born-again experience. The Jews had been illuminated by the Spirit through the Scriptures. They tasted the powers to come via the miracles and teachings of the prophets.

But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner.

Second, the author addresses here a completely different audience than in the first part of the chapter. He calls this group beloved, a term never used in Scripture apart from God's people. He is persuaded of better things concerning them, as opposed to the curses of the people mentioned before. He considers them a people devoted to works of love in the Name of Jesus, who minister to other believers. They are heirs of the covenant of

Abraham, with a sure anchor for the soul. Nothing in v.1-8 mentions anything like this. It is clear therefore, that the author is distinguishing between those saved and those merely religious.

Thirdly, as for the knowledge of the Gospel, nothing in the text proves that this was a saving knowledge.

In summary, Hebrews Ch.6 is not a contrast between backslidden Christians and faithful believers. It compares certain Jews who were vacillating between Christianity and Judaism, with Jews committed to Christ. It is a warning to the indecisive to decide once and for all.

Galatians 5:4

You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

Based on this text, opponents of preservation affirm that believers can fall from grace, and lose their salvation, being cut off from Christ.

Answer: We have never affirmed that this is impossible. Given certain conditions, this could happen. What we deny is that God has ever allowed that to happen to any of his justified, elect people, because He is faithful to his covenant promises.

Further, Paul is warning the church as a whole of the danger of placing part of their justification on another basis than Christ. He simply means that the church as a whole is in danger of apostatizing. He says nothing about individuals losing their salvation.

The doctrine of preservation is contrary to the idea of free will

Answer: The objection misunderstands 'free will'. Free means the capacity to choose what one wants. What a person is, determines what he wants. Since the will of a sinner is bound to his sinful nature, he rejects Christ. But the regenerate man chooses to persevere because he has a new nature. He wants to persevere. God does not have to force his will.

Preservation is a license to sin

Answer: Born-again people do not want a license to sin. The good news of preservation motivates them to purify themselves. (I Jn.3: 3) Those who use the doctrine of preservation as a license to sin, prove themselves to be Reprobates.

Jesus said, *He who perseveres to the end shall be saved.* This appears to contradict the doctrine of preservation.

Answer: This objection reads several hidden presuppositions into the text. It assumes that some genuine believers do not persevere, and thus are lost. What in the text obliges us to assume that? It is true that those who persevere will be saved. Why must it follow that some elect have not persevered?

Remember, a command to persevere proves only what we ought to do, not what we can do without grace. Such an objection would be as senseless as saying that faith is not a gift of God simply because God commanded, Believe and you shall be saved.

1Cor. 9:27

But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

This text seems to express Paul's concern about losing his salvation. How do we square this with preservation?

Answer: Let's suppose that the term disqualified meant lose salvation. This would still constitute no negation of preservation. It would simply show that Paul understood the importance of self-discipline as the means of preservation.

Nevertheless, it seems peculiar to affirm that the term disqualified can only mean lose your salvation. If it can mean disqualified from ministry through indiscipline, then no reason exists for assuming it *must* mean lose your salvation.

Chapter Eight: The Golden Chain

The unity of the doctrines of grace in the eternal covenant

The doctrines of grace are like keys on a golden chain. We carry them to open our understanding of God's gracious purposes for us. What is this golden 'chain' that binds them together? Let's call it the Covenant of Grace.

What is a covenant?

Covenant means 'contract', 'agreement', or 'alliance'. The Bible sometimes uses the word Testament. Essentially a covenant means an agreement between two parties.

When people make agreements, they do so because of expected mutual benefits in which each gives something to get something in return. The basis of all human contracts is this idea of mutual benefit.

In the covenant of grace, another principle dominates. God makes a covenant with man, although man is unable to contribute anything. We have nothing to offer God in exchange for his grace. So the divine covenant has a unique character. It is more like an immutable decree in which all the benefits accrue to our side. The only benefit that God receives is the opportunity to display his grace and love

How was the covenant of grace instituted?

Sometimes the covenant is called covenant With Abraham, because God instituted it with him. Although God manifested his grace beforehand in believers like Noah, Enoch and others, God declared it to Abraham in the formal sense of a legal 'covenant'.

What are the essential elements of the covenant?

In Genesis Chapter 12, God spoke to Abraham about the fundamental nature of the covenant. Then in Chapter 17, He outlined some key elements:

The condition of the covenant

In Genesis 17:1, God reveals the basic condition: Walk with God and be perfect.

Big problem! Nobody arrives at perfection in this life. Must we therefore wait until we get to heaven to enjoy the benefits of the covenant? Thanks to the imputed righteousness of Christ through justification, we experience the covenant benefits now.

Curiously, the covenant seems conditional and unconditional simultaneously, depending on the way we look at it. On one hand, it is conditional because God requires perfection. On the other, it is unconditional because Christ accomplished perfection for all the elect as their substitute.

The duration of the covenant

God calls it an everlasting covenant in Gen.17:7. Paul also, in Galatians 3, underlines the immutable character of the covenant by comparing it with human contracts. He argues that even if it were a mere human contract, no one annuls it or removes anything from it. How much more sure then, is a covenant made by God?

Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though it is only a man's covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it. Gal. 3:15

The Bible emphasizes the eternal character of the covenant in such texts as Is.55:10; 59:21; 61:8-9; Gal.3:6-15.

It is a family covenant

The covenant includes believers and their children. God emphasizes this throughout Gen.17. The point is supremely important, because on the grounds of this principle we enter the covenant made with Abraham. Paul explains in Galatians Chapters 3&4 that Jesus Christ was the promised seed of Abraham. We also are Abraham's children through faith in Christ, and participants in the same covenant.

Although the term *descendants of Abraham* has a figurative and spiritual aspect, it also contains a literal element. The offspring of believers enjoy certain advantages because of the covenant, although they may never be saved.

The family element is central to the covenant.

This is notable in God's discourse with Abraham. In Gen.17:18, Abraham said, OH, that Ishmael might live before You! Abraham supposed that God was referring to Ishmael when he received the promise. But God explained that Sarah would give birth to another son, Isaac, who would be the real heir of the covenant. Nevertheless, God blessed Ishmael also with earthly blessings, simply because Ishmael was a child of Abraham.

The Bible abounds in precious promises regarding the children of the righteous:

As for Me, says the Lord, this is My covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants, says the Lord, from this time and forevermore. Is.59:21

The offspring of the righteous will not lack food. (Ps.37:25) They will live securely. (Ps.102:28) They will have hope. (Pr.14:26) They will be blessed. (Pr.20:7)

The Apostles recognized this family aspect of the covenant. Peter declared in his sermon at Pentecost: For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.

Paul recognized a certain legal sanctification, (although not regenerative), on the families of believers in 1Cor.7:14:

For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.

The sign and seal of the covenant

God gave circumcision to Abraham as the external sign of the covenant. (Gen.17:10 & Rom.4:11) This sign was to continue until Jesus came and changed it to baptism. (Col.2:11-12). The two signs symbolize the same thing: The change of heart that God gives to his people. (Rom.2:28-29 w/ Tit. 3:5-6)

The word sign means symbol, and suggests the relationship of the believer to the covenant. The word seal indicates the divine promise to fulfill the benefits of the covenant.

What are the benefits of the covenant?

A story is told about a poor man from Europe who wanted to immigrate to the United States to have a better life. He had barely enough money for the ticket on the ship, but not enough for food for the trip. He bought the ticket, and boarded the ship with the little food he had ...a loaf of bread and a cheese. He hoped that this food would last until he arrived in New York.

For three weeks this gentleman lived on his bread and cheese, avoiding the dining room where it pained him to see the other passengers enjoying the sumptuous dishes. On the last day of the trip, he happened to notice something written on the back of his ticket: All meals are included.

The covenant of grace is like the ticket of the poor passenger. Some Christians live deprived of the promised benefits, because they fail to understand what their 'ticket' includes. Their prayers take the character of pleadings like beggars, not a solid faith, because they do not understand their rights under the covenant.

The promise of the Holy Spirit

In Gal.3:14 we read that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Christ died on the cross, according to v.13, to guarantee that the power of the Spirit would reach all believers, Jews and gentiles. This includes all the Spirit's ministries: his power, his gifts, his work of sanctification and liberation in the life of the believer.

The devil assails believers, trying to give them an inferiority complex. To the women he says, You can't have the power of the Spirit, nor spiritual gifts, because you are only a woman. To the men he says, that's for women. To the youth he says, You're too young. You need more maturity to be blessed with spiritual gifts. To the elders he says, You're too old. The young people won't listen to you.

The promise of the Spirit is for all of Abraham's children. At Pentecost, Peter said that God would pour out his Spirit on all flesh:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams. Acts 2:17

We pray with more confidence as we understand why God is willing to grant us his power and his gifts. Our ‘ticket’, the covenant of grace, includes all these.

Blessings on our children

The Devil lies to parents, telling them that it is scarcely worth the effort to pray for their wayward children because after all, the children have free will. God would hardly see fit to violate *that*.

God never asked Isaac’s permission before declaring him as heir of the covenant. The Lord promises blessing on the children of believers simply because they are children of believers ...not because they have a cooperative ‘free will’. God has more regard for his covenant than He does for the state of their ‘will’.

The covenant of grace gives Christian parents a solid basis for praying for their children. Satan cannot prevent God from blessing their children, because the grounds of such blessings is his covenant, not the will of the children.

An eternal inheritance

Christ died to guarantee that the called of God would attain their eternal inheritance. Heb. 9:15

And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

Christians occasionally become discouraged when they consider their faults and weaknesses. It seems impossible to attain to the entire perfection that the Bible promises. The struggle against sin appears so difficult. But we have a covenant with God, along with a Guarantor Who guarantees the victory.

He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it. 1Thess.5:24

Victory over our enemies

God promised Abraham,

I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Gen. 12:3

Zacharias, father of John the Baptist, prayed,

That we should be saved from our enemies And from the hand of all who hate us, 72 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers And to remember his holy covenant t,73 The oath which He swore to our father Abraham: 74 To grant us that we, Being delivered from the hand of our

enemies, Might serve him without fear,⁷⁵ In holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways, Luke 1:71-75

God has surprising methods for liberating us from our enemies. Sometimes He converts them to Christ! Although Christians receive persecution, they know that God has even this under his control and even this will help the furtherance of the Gospel. Paul recognized this by saying, *For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth. 1Cor.13:8*

The acronym Si, Jesus, and the doctrines of grace

These doctrines are really component elements of the covenant of grace. Let's examine each of these to see how they relate.

Sovereignty of God

The covenant is based directly on the immutability of the sovereign will of God. In the first chapter, we saw that nothing in God changes, including his eternal attributes. All his counsels are irresistible.

Few other Bible texts shed light on the link between the covenant and God's immutable will than Hebrews 6:13-20. In ancient times, people sealed covenants with oaths. God accommodated himself to this custom by inaugurated the covenant with an oath:

For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by himself,¹⁴ saying, Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you. Heb. 6:13-14

Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath, v.17

In thinking about our relationship to God within the covenant, it helps to remember that the divine decrees are immutable. This alleviates the fear that God may remove us from the covenant for our faults. God helps us set aside such notions by basing the covenant in his own character, via an oath.

Inability of man

The nation of Israel had nothing to offer when God established the covenant. Through Ezekiel, God said in a parable, *And when I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' Yes, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' Ez. 16:6*

Israel was like a newborn child, abandoned. Only death awaited her. But God, like a rich and compassionate man, took Israel and adopted her as his own child.

We also were born dead in sin, insensible to divine things, selfish and insensitive. Nevertheless, God bound us to himself with a covenant. In this doctrine of total inability we see the unconditional aspect of the covenant. We contributed nothing.

Justification by faith

Abraham faced a terrible dilemma when God told him, walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between Me and you ...Gen.17:2-3

How discouraging to hear that perfection is the condition for having the benefits of the covenant! That is enough to dishearten the most saintly, because nobody is perfect. Is there a solution?

Yes! Jesus Christ! He is the only one who fulfilled the condition necessary to obtain the benefits of the covenant. In this sense, God made the covenant with Christ alone. But since we are in Christ, we have in him all the benefits through faith. *And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one. Jn.17:22*

Election by grace

Election proceeds from the covenant since God accomplished it for his elect only. *I have made a covenant with My chosen, ...Ps.89:3*) He never made a covenant like this with any other nation but Israel because it was the only elect nation. The covenant is particular, not universal.

Sacrifice of Christ

The cross bought something for Christ, also. It purchased the right to act as Guarantor, High Priest and Mediator of the covenant. (Heb.7:22 & Chapters 8, 9 & 10 of Hebrews.)

A guarantor is person with the authority to ensure that the participants in an agreement receive the benefits promised. *...by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant. Heb.7:22*

When God gave to Moses the covenant of the Law, he sprinkled with blood the books, the Ark of Testimony, and the other elements of the service, as a sign of the confirmation of the covenant. (Hebrews Chapters Eight & Nine)

The same principle of confirmation by blood exists in the covenant of grace. The blood of Christ is God's final confirmation of the covenant.

Universality of the church and spiritual unity of all believers

The people of God in both Testaments, Old and New, are bound together by the same covenantal relationship. There exists only one people of God, not two. As Paul showed through the example with Abraham, the Old Testament saints were saved in essentially the same manner as we. They were justified by faith, had the same Savior, and participated in the same covenant. Paul even called this covenant, the good news, i.e., the Gospel. Gal.3:8.

The Lord's Supper illustrates the unity of the people of God in the covenant. Christ said, *For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. Matt.26:28* By saying, *Drink from it, all of you, (v.27)* He indicated that covenant bond is not only between us and God, but with each other.

Paul underlined the same in 1Cor.10:16, by comparing the bread of the Supper with us, the Church. Though the bread represents Christ primarily, it also symbolizes the spiritual unity we have with each other in the covenant.

Security of the elect

The immutability of the covenant, the efficacy of the ministry of the Lord Jesus as Mediator, the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, the efficacy of his sacrifice to confirm the covenant...

God promises to chastise his covenant Children who stray, but He will not destroy them. From the viewpoint of pure justice, there seems no good reason for the Jews to exist today. Where are the Demotes, the Philistines, the Gibeonites? Extinct races all. The only explanation is,

For I am the Lord, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob. Mal.3:6

Though God destroyed other nations for committing the same sins as Israel, yet God preserved his elect nation.

But the Lord was gracious to them, had compassion on them, and regarded them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not yet destroy them or cast them from his presence. 2Kings13:23

The inexpressible comfort of the covenant resides in that, *The bond of the covenant is capable of carrying the weight of the believer's heaviest burden.* ³¹

Though God punishes and corrects his elect people, and causes them to grieve over their sins, He never casts them away.

I say then, has God cast away his people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away his people whom He foreknew. Rom.11:1-2

Let no one imagine that our participation in the covenant relieves us from participating in corrective disciplines. To the contrary, it is precisely because of the covenant that God corrects his children.

You only have I known of all the families of the earth; Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities. Amos 3:2

The covenant is a paradox. It is both a profound security and a serious warning. It guarantees an eternal inheritance, but promises no easy roads ...just a sure destination. The covenant is an uncomfortable security, in which God spares nothing to ensure our maturity and obedience.

Summary

By the sovereign will of God, the elect have an inviolable agreement with God, with the guarantee of an eternal inheritance. It includes promises for their children, victory over enemies, and provision for their needs. Though the elect are entirely incapable and totally unworthy to

enter the covenant, Christ died to confirm the covenant. By the gift of faith, He justifies them, so as to unite them with the people of God of every epoch. He is forming them into one body with Christ, saved and kept forever.

This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil. Heb.6:19

Questions for Review: The Golden Chain

1. The covenant of grace differs from human contracts in that:
 - A. God makes covenants only with those who do good works.
 - B. Man contributes nothing to the covenant.
 - C. The covenant of grace was never put in writing.
2. Sometimes the covenant of grace is called _____.
3. True or False _____ Before the covenant with Abraham, grace did not exist.
4. True or False _____ The covenant is conditional and unconditional simultaneously, according to our perspective.
5. True or False _____ God requires perfection as a condition of the covenant.
6. When God makes a covenant with a believer, He also includes _____.
7. God gave to Abraham the rite of _____ as an external sign of the covenant. But in the New Testament changes this sign to _____.
8. The benefits of the covenant are:
 - A. _____
 - B. _____
 - C. _____
 - D. _____
9. The covenant of grace is a solid basis for our _____ of salvation.
10. The doctrine of the sovereignty of God relates to the covenant of grace in that,

11. The doctrine of the total inability of man relates to the covenant of grace in that,

12. The doctrine of justification relates to the covenant of grace in that,

13. The doctrine of election relates to the covenant of grace in that,

14. The doctrine of the sacrifice of Christ relates to the covenant of grace in that,

15. The doctrine of the Universality and Unity of all believers relates to the covenant of grace in that,

16. The doctrine of the Security of the elect relates to the covenant of grace in that,

17. True or False_____ God promises to destroy completely our disobedient children if they do not fulfill the requirements of the covenant.

18. True or False_____ Our participation in the covenant relieves us from all divine corrections for our sins.

Answers. 1=B, 2=covenant with Abraham, 3=F, 4=T, 5=T, 6=their children, 7=circumcision; baptism, 8=A) Holy Spirit, B) Blessing on the children C)Justification D)Eternal Inheritance 9= Security 10=believers of all ages participate in it 11=man contributes nothing to the covenant, 12=Christ accomplished the requirement of perfection under the covenant, as our substitute., 13=The covenant is for the elect only, 14=The blood of Christ confirms the covenant, making Christ the Guarantor and Mediator of it., 15=Via the covenant, there exists only one people of God,16=The covenant is the grounds of our security of salvation, 17=F; 18=F

Epilogue

Grace wants to go home

Occasionally someone asks me why I wrote this book. I experience a twinge of chagrin at this because I suspect the reader missed something in the message of grace.

Grace is restless. It cannot sit still and do nothing. It wants to go places and do things. The thing it wants most to do is glorify God. The place it wants most to go is back home. Those who have received a generous portion of grace know this. Each, in his own distinctive way, feels compelled to give something back in gratitude.

What parent has not had a child hand him a gift that came from the parent in the first place? The difference with grace, though, is that when we give it back, we find it still in our hand, but altered. It has grown bigger. It always wants to return to its Source, to be more than it was before.

I am a writer. I do not know how else to give back my portion. So I wrote this book for the simplest of reasons.

I wrote it because I could not do otherwise.

¹ Mt.26:55-56

² Spoken in this author's presence at L'Abri, Switzerland during a discourse to students, c. 1968.

³ Quoted from C.S. Lewis, in *Gathered Golden*, John Blanchard, Evangelical Press 1989 pp. 74.

⁴ *Isa. 64:6*

⁵ *Rom. 14:23*

⁶ *John 6:28*

⁷ *The Bondage of The Will* by Martin Luther. Section XVIII, No.783.

⁸ This is the meaning of the corresponding Greek verb, DIKAIAO. A couple of good examples showing the 'vindication' aspect of its meaning are: Rom.3:4-That You may be justified in Your words . . . The text refers to the 'justification', (i.e., 'vindication'), of God relative to human accusation. It could hardly be said that 'justified' here means 'MAKE righteous. Another example is 1Ti.3:16, in which Paul, referring to the incarnation of God in Christ, says, God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit. That is, the work of the Spirit through Christ vindicated his claims. Jesus, being God, was not MADE righteous, but rather declared by the Spirit to be so, and thus vindicated with regard to all accusations.

⁹ The 'process' aspect of sanctification occurs in such texts as Heb. 10:14, For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. Notice the interesting parallel between the accomplished fact of redemption, (has perfected forever), versus the continuous present tense application via sanctification as a process, (being sanctified).

¹⁰ Hodges, Charles: *Systematic Theology*, Vol.2, pp.203

¹¹ All other arguments are really just variations of these.

¹² *The Translator's Handbook*, a guide used by Wycliffe translators tells us that, *those who had been chosen for eternal life* is a phrase which occurs frequently in rabbinic literature. The meaning is clearly that those whom God had chosen became believers, and the translator must not attempt to weaken this meaning.

Chosen for eternal life may thus be rendered as whom God had selected in order that they would have eternal life. *A Translator's Handbook on the Acts of the Apostles* by Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, Copyright 1972

¹³ Quoted in *Gathered Gold*, John Blanchard, Evangelical Press 1989, pp 74

¹⁴ It was not so common four hundred years ago during the Reformation. Some theologians feel that the popularity of this view among modern Christians owes itself more to the pervasive influence of Renaissance Humanism than to Reformation Theism.

¹⁵ The term 'world', as used throughout the Bible, and especially by John, has at least five meanings. Of the 185 times that John uses it, perhaps we may interpret 11 this way, but even those are disputable. Normally the intent of the word is to communicate that the Gospel is for all ethnic groups, and not just for Jews exclusively. John, like the other Apostles, seemed particularly concerned about communicating the universality of the Gospel message. This was a key controversy in his day.

¹⁶ In theology we call these blessings, 'Common Grace', as distinguished from personal salvation, which is 'Special Grace'.

¹⁷ 15 We agree that the Gospel is an offer to all, but this is not the point of Peter's discourse here.

¹⁸ Let's be careful to distinguish here between Universal Atonement and Universal Reconciliation. The former simply means that Christ died with the intent of saving as many as his church could persuade. The latter means that everyone will be saved. Those who hold to Universal Redemption do not necessarily believe that everyone will be saved.

¹⁹ Packer, J.I.: Introductory Essay to: *Death of Death* by John Owen, Banner of Truth Trust, pp.10.

²⁰ Packer, J.I.: Introductory Essay to *Death of Death* by John Owen, Banner of Truth Trust, pp.10.

²¹ (Note: Some have affirmed that the word draw in this verse suggests a moral persuasion that the sinner can resist. The problem with this is that the Greek word draw used here, (HELKUO), always means drag, in the sense of compulsion. Even if we did not know what it meant, we could deduce its meaning from the phrase, and I will raise him up at the last day. That is to say, all those who are objects of the Father's drawing action will be saved infallibly. This leaves no room for an effective resistance by the sinner.

²² Packer, J.I.: Introductory essay to *Death of Death* by John Owen, Banner of Truth Trust, pp.14.

²³ In other words, the contents of the Apostle's Creed.

²⁴ The ancient dictum, 'absolute power corrupts absolutely', is as true in a church as anywhere else. Sometimes I think it is more so.

²⁵ This was the Arminian party, founded in Holland by the Dutch pastor Jacob Arminius, born 1560. The Synod of Dort in Holland debated his views in 1618 and proved them heretical.

²⁶ Some groups of Baptists hold this view, and label it the doctrine of Eternal Security.

²⁷ Throughout the remainder of this chapter, we shall use the term Preservation to distinguish the Reformed doctrine from the other two views.

²⁸ The sense of the Greek verb requires this interpretation.

²⁹ Note that 'work out' is not equivalent to 'work at'.

³⁰ James 2:9

³¹ William S. Plummer, *Gathered Gold*, John Blanchard, pp. 52.