

# Sovereign Grace

## An Examination of the Five Points of Calvinism

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### Introduction

The modern era is a time of great theological ignorance, indifference, and declension. Most of the denominations and churches which are generally referred to as conservative, Bible-believing and evangelical have in the past few hundred years succumbed to Arminian<sup>1</sup> or semi-Pelagian interpretations of the doctrine of salvation. The doctrines of sovereign grace which have been nicknamed “Augustinianism” or “Calvinism” have been abandoned as obsolete, unfair, unbiblical, and irrational. The typical evangelical usually hears the name Calvin or the term Calvinism treated scornfully from the pulpit or at a Bible study. It is even labeled a dangerous heresy by some. People are *falsely* told that Calvinism destroys personal responsibility; that it teaches that people are little better than robots, etc.

The purpose of this book is to examine the five points of Calvinism in order to prove that they are thoroughly scriptural and to dispel the common misconceptions often heard regarding them. This task will involve refuting some of the typical Arminian doctrines which are so popular today. Many poor souls have been seduced by Arminianism’s appeal to human autonomy. People need to be made aware that *Arminianism is a deadly perversion of the gospel of Christ*. It implicitly denies the sovereignty of God; it perverts the doctrine of original sin; it turns the doctrine of election upside down and makes the new birth dependent upon man’s will. In the Arminian scheme men are not saved *through* faith, which is a gift of God (Eph. 2:8), but rather *because of* faith. Furthermore, Christ’s atoning death is not viewed as securing any person’s salvation, but merely making salvation possible between God and sinful man.

### Man’s Need of Salvation: Total Depravity and Man’s Inability

We begin our study of God’s sovereign grace in salvation with the biblical teaching regarding the effect of the fall upon man and the doctrine of original sin. This teaching is crucial for understanding the doctrine of salvation because one’s understanding of the effects of the fall upon mankind will largely determine one’s view of salvation. In other words, a person’s view of man’s state resulting from Adam’s sin is foundational to that person’s concept of how man appropriates salvation. Obviously, a person who views man as spiritually dead and unable to do

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<sup>1</sup> The word Arminianism is used somewhat loosely today. What is commonly referred to as Arminianism today is more often semi-Pelagianism. Most modern Arminians do not believe in total depravity, but merely that man is spiritually sick. Man still has spiritual ability and thus will choose Christ if the right techniques are brought to bear. The author has met Baptists and Charismatics that were outright Pelagians in their view of original sin. We live in an age of such ignorance of basic doctrines that a label such as Arminianism is used in a general manner to describe the heretical notions of the fall, the atonement, special grace, the new birth, perseverance, etc common among modern evangelicals. The old style Arminianism of the Remonstrants and John Wesley is in the minority among evangelicals. Modern Arminianism should be considered a hybrid of Arminianism and semi-Pelagianism

anything that meets with God's approval will view salvation differently than a person who believes that man is sick and weakened but is still able to cooperate with God in the salvation process.

### **What Happened When Adam Sinned?**

The Bible teaches that Adam was created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26) with true knowledge, righteousness and holiness (Gen. 1:31; Ecc. 7:29; Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24). Adam's nature was intrinsically good and he had the spiritual and ethical ability to perfectly obey anything that God required of him. After God created Adam, He made a covenant or verbal agreement with him. God promised Adam that if he rendered a perfect and personal obedience to God he would never die. (This promise is clearly implied by Gen. 2:17; Gal. 3:10; Rom. 5:12-20; 10:5.) If at any time Adam violated God's law by eating the fruit from the forbidden tree, he would certainly die (Gen. 2:17). Genesis chapter 3 records Adam's failure to obey God. Adam sinned in eating the forbidden fruit (Rom. 5:12ff); fell from his original righteousness; lost his communion with God; was cast out of paradise; and "became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body" (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 6:2; see Gen. 6:5; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:10ff; Tit. 1:15; etc).

The Bible teaches that Adam's sin not only had very negative spiritual consequences for himself, but also for the whole human race (i.e. everyone descending from Adam by ordinary generation). The teaching that mankind is guilty of sin in Adam and corrupted in nature because of Adam's sin is commonly referred to as original sin. This teaching is part of the faith of every branch of Christendom. The disagreements on this teaching are over the nature and extent of man's corruption (this will be considered below).

God's Word says that the guilt of Adam's sin is imputed to all men. (To impute Adam's sin means that God reckons it to, or lays it to one's account.) The teaching that "in Adam's fall we sinned all" is explicitly taught by Paul in Romans 5:12, 15-19: "Through one man [Adam] sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned [in Adam's transgression]...by the one man's offense many died...judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation...by the one man's offense death reigned through the one...through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation...by one man's disobedience many were made sinners." There was a kind of solidarity between Adam and the human race because God determined that Adam (the first created man) was the federal head of all mankind. "It is no less a doctrine of Scripture than a fact of experience that mankind are a fallen race."<sup>2</sup> Tragically, as a result of Adam's sin, all men also inherited Adam's moral corruption. The pollution or inner corruption of sin passes from Adam to his posterity by ordinary generation. "That our first parents are now not only really guilty before God but also morally corrupt throughout their entire being is also immediately evident in the fact that their first transgression is immediately followed by a series of transgressions. It is now their nature to act in accordance with their new sinful condition. We see Adam and then Eve refusing to acknowledge openly their willful act of disobedience and to take the blame for it. Adam blames his wife and, indirectly, God himself for his situation. Eve then blames the serpent."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 2:195.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 447.

“The consequences of Adam’s sin are all comprehended under the term death in its widest sense.”<sup>4</sup> Because of Adam’s sin spiritual and physical death passed to all men. All men naturally born of Adam’s seed come into this world spiritually dead; with an innate hatred and hostility toward God; with a depraved soul that loves sin and cannot cease from it; with ethical pollution that extends to every aspect of his nature. “The imagination of a man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Gen. 8:21). Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me” (Ps. 51:5). “The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born speaking lies” (Ps. 58:3). “For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin” (Eccl. 7:20). “That which is born of the flesh is flesh” (Jn. 3:6). “We were by nature children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3; see 1 Ki. 8:46; Isa. 53:6; 64:6; Ps. 130:3; 143:2; Rom. 3:19, 22, 23; Gal. 3:22; Ja. 3:2; 1 Jn. 1:8, 10; 5:19, etc). According to Scripture, Adam’s sin and its consequences (real guilt, liability of punishment, spiritual death and man’s inherited moral corruption) have rendered man unable to respond to the gospel and even unable to cooperate by his own self-determining power or “free will” with the first motions of grace. Our state after the fall is spiritual death, not a mere sickness. Therefore, we must acknowledge the greatness of our sin, slavery and misery and earnestly acknowledge that salvation is absolutely and solely a work of God’s grace.

### **The Debate over “Free Will”**

Before we proceed with Scriptural proofs for the teaching of total depravity and total inability, we would do well to spend some time examining the controversy over human ability in church history. The importance of the doctrine of the fall and its consequences, as it affects the doctrine of salvation, cannot be overestimated. Throughout history one’s concept of original sin has had a profound effect on many other doctrines such as regeneration, effectual calling, conversion, the nature and extent of the atonement, justification and perseverance. As we study the controversy over free will, some questions that we need to continually ask ourselves are: Which person’s theology is rooted in the exegesis of Scripture? What theologians are attempting to impose a human philosophy upon the text of Scripture? What doctrine ascribes all the glory for salvation to God? What teaching appeals to our fallen human nature? What doctrine of original sin supports rather than contradicts the other great doctrines of the Bible?

### **Pelagianism**

The first great controversy over the doctrine of original sin and its relationship to how God’s grace operates was the Pelagian controversy. The Pelagian movement was named after Pelagius (A.D. 360-420), a British layman who advocated asceticism. Pelagius had become a teacher of asceticism in Rome (c. 400) and believed that the church’s view of original sin, which at that time was dominated by Augustinianism, denied human responsibility and thus discouraged holiness. Pelagius was the first theologian to set forth the principle “that man must have plenary ability to do and to be whatever can be righteously required of him....The intimate conviction that man can be responsible for nothing which is not in their power, led, in the first

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<sup>4</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, [1932] 1979), 73.

place, to the Pelagian doctrine of the freedom of the will.”<sup>5</sup> The philosophical presupposition set forth by Pelagius regarding freedom of the will and human responsibility completely and consistently dominated his whole theological system.

In the attempt to preserve his concept of human responsibility, Pelagius and his followers taught the following: (1) Adam’s sin only brought injury to himself and no one else. (2) There is no such thing as original sin, or inherent hereditary moral corruption. (3) Everyone born after Adam is the same as Adam was before the fall. (4) Adam’s sin was only a bad example to his posterity and nothing more. (5) Since all men are born without the contamination of original sin and moral depravity, everyone has the full ability to do everything that God requires and many men have lived without sin. Pelagius and his followers taught that men could be saved without the gospel by keeping the law. “The only difference is that under the light of the Gospel, the perfect obedience is rendered more easy.”<sup>6</sup> (6) Adam in a state of innocence was mortal and would have died whether he sinned or not. Therefore, the fact that all men grow old, and die, has nothing to do with the fall. (7) The grace of God refers not to unmerited favor to undeserving sinners but simply to the natural endowments of men which are gifts from God. “[G]race merely enables us to do more easily what we could still do without it, albeit with greater difficulty.”<sup>7</sup>

The teachings of Pelagius and his followers were condemned at the council of Carthage (A. D. 418) and again at the Council of Ephesus (A. D. 431). While Pelagianism was a dangerous heresy because it denied the grace of God and the gospel, it nevertheless was used by God to greatly sharpen the early church’s understanding of original sin and the nature of saving grace. The controversy raised the question that is still with us today: Are sinners saved because of their own will, strength or exertion or are they saved solely by God’s grace, solely by what God does? Although the modern evangelical will recognize the obvious, gross deficiencies of the Pelagian system, nevertheless the central presupposition underlying Pelagianism lives on. That is, the philosophical idea that responsibility presupposes human ability.

## Semi-Pelagianism

After Pelagianism was defeated with the help of great theologians such as Augustine (A. D. 354-430), bishop of Hippo,<sup>8</sup> it went underground and reemerged in a milder, more palatable

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:152. In defining the Pelagian system this author has depended primarily upon Charles Hodge’s *Systematic Theology*.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 2:154.

<sup>7</sup> D. F. Wright, “Pelagianism” in *New Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 500.

<sup>8</sup> Augustine taught the following doctrines that are foundational to biblical Christianity and at one time were held universally by the Protestant Reformers. “(1.) That if men are saved it cannot be by their own merit, but solely through the undeserved love of God. (2.) That the regeneration of the soul must be the exclusive and supernatural work of the Holy Ghost; that the sinner could neither effect the work nor cooperate in its production. In other words, that grace is certainly efficacious or irresistible. (3.) That salvation is of grace or of the sovereign mercy of God, (a.) In that God might justly have left men to perish in their apostasy without any provision for their redemption. (b.) In that men, being destitute of the power of doing anything holy or meritorious, their justification cannot be by works, but must be a matter of favour. (c.) In that it depends not on the will of the persons saved, but on the good pleasure of God, who are to be made partakers of the redemption of Christ. In other words, election to eternal life must be founded on the sovereign pleasure of God, and not on the foresight of good works. (4.) A fourth inference from the principles of Augustine was the perseverance of the saints. If God of his own good pleasure elects some to eternal life, they cannot fail of salvation. It thus appears that as all the distinguishing doctrines of the Pelagians are the logical consequences of their principle of plenary ability as the ground and limit of obligation, so the distinguishing doctrines of Augustine are the logical consequences of his principle of the entire inability of fallen man to do anything spiritually good” (Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:160-161).

form. Although the original semi-Pelagians differed in many areas, the general teachings of semi-Pelagians are as follows. Contrary to Pelagius, the sin and corruption of Adam *did* pass on to his posterity causing disease, suffering, mortality and a propensity toward evil. Therefore, man needs divine assistance if he is to do anything spiritually good. But, contrary to the pure grace system of Augustine, they held: “(1) That the beginning of salvation is with man. Man begins to seek God, and then God aids him. (2) That this incipient turning of the soul towards God is something good, and in one sense meritorious. (3) That the soul, in virtue of its liberty of will or ability for good, cooperates with the grace of God in regeneration....”<sup>9</sup>

Although there are differences between semi-Pelagianism and classical Arminianism, the similarities between semi-Pelagianism and what is taught in many modern evangelical churches is striking. Most modern evangelicals do not believe that man is really spiritually dead and totally depraved as a result of the fall but merely that man is spiritually sick. In other words, man still has spiritual ability and, thus, can make a move toward Jesus and even choose Him if the right techniques are employed. Further, the common doctrine among evangelicals and fundamentalists called “decisional regeneration” is very similar to semi-Pelagianism. In many evangelical churches people are told to come to the front of the church (“the altar call”), choose Christ or pray a prayer, and the result will be that God will respond to man’s act or choice and then man will be born again. In other words, man cooperates with God and allows God to save him. This teaching is very different from the biblical view that men are dead in trespasses and sin and the Holy Spirit raises the dead heart to life, regenerates it and causes it to savingly embrace Christ.

Although semi-Pelagianism was condemned by the church at the Second Council of Orange in A. D. 529, the church accepted a modified version of semi-Pelagianism (a semi-semi-Pelagianism) and, thus, eliminated the contradiction between Augustine’s soteriology and ecclesiology. The Roman Catholic Church accepted a synergistic doctrine of salvation which better suited their man-controlled “channels of grace” concept of the sacraments. Thus, tragically in the sphere of salvation most of modern evangelicalism has unknowingly sided itself with Romanism and not the Protestant Reformation.

## **Arminianism**

Arminianism is named after a Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609). As a professor in Leiden, Arminius began to challenge the doctrines of grace as then taught in the Dutch Reformed churches. His views were developed and systematized by his followers in the five theses of the Remonstrant Articles (1610); now commonly known as the five points of Arminianism. Regarding original sin and man’s state after the fall the first point of Arminianism reads,

Free Will or Human Ability. Although human nature was seriously affected by the Fall, man has not been left in a state of total spiritual helplessness. God graciously enables

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This aspect of Augustine’s theology would be the seed of the Protestant Reformation that would be independently discovered by the Augustinian monk Martin Luther. The other side of Augustine’s theology, his ecclesiology and sacramentalism were inconsistent with his teachings on salvation by grace alone and would contribute to the apostasy of the Roman Catholic Church. Augustine believed that salvation was by a direct act of God. And, he unfortunately also taught that salvation was dispensed through the church hierarchy and its sacraments. With Augustine we find the pure water of the gospel mixed with the filthy oil of sacerdotalism.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:167.

every sinner to repent and believe, but He does so in such a manner as not to interfere with man's freedom. Each sinner possesses a free will, and his eternal destiny depends on how he uses it. Man's freedom consists of his ability to choose good over evil in spiritual matters; his will is not enslaved to his sinful nature. The sinner has the power either to cooperate with God's Spirit and be regenerated or to resist God's grace and perish. The lost sinner needs the Spirit's assistance, but he does not have to be regenerated by the Spirit before he can believe, for faith is man's act and precedes the new birth. Faith is the sinner's gift to God; it is man's contribution to salvation.<sup>10</sup>

Like semi-Pelagianism, Arminianism teaches that human nature is injured by the fall, but man still has the ability to do that which is spiritually good and turn to God.

Although Arminianism as a system is more developed and sophisticated than semi-Pelagianism, it still adheres to the central core of semi-Pelagianian teaching. That is, that man is only partially depraved and, thus, his will though damaged still has the ability to see spiritual good and generate faith toward Christ. Sinners just need a little help. Man needs "the preventing, exciting and assisting grace of God in order to their conversion..."<sup>11</sup> Further, "This divine grace is afforded to all men in sufficient measure to enable them to repent, believe, and keep all the commandments of God."<sup>12</sup> Thus, man, and not God, is sovereign over his own salvation. Man, according to Arminian doctrine, does not need a spiritual resurrection from the dead in order to believe, but merely some first aid. According to Arminianism, salvation is a cooperative effort between God and man in which man plays the most important role. This teaching is synergistic in that man contributes something to his own salvation. Indeed, man allows God to regenerate and save him. "The Arminian order of salvation, while ostensibly ascribing the work of salvation to God, really makes it contingent on the attitude and the work of man. God opens the possibility of salvation for man, but it is up to man to improve the opportunity."<sup>13</sup>

John Wesley (1703-1791) and his followers made some changes in classical Arminianism by teaching that, as a result of the fall, man's depravity was total; that the natural man does not have any intrinsic power to cooperate with the grace of God. But, he argued, since Christ died for all men without exception and they are justified in Him, this guilt and total depravity is immediately removed at birth. Thus, all men come into the world with an ability (bestowed by Jesus) to cooperate with God in salvation. The Wesleyans called this new system Evangelical Arminianism. Wesley believed this clever method of arriving at a universal unencumbered will, while maintaining the orthodox doctrine of original sin, eliminated the charge that he was teaching a form of semi-Pelagianism. Although we must give credit to Wesley for attempting to avoid semi-Pelagianism, his free-willism through the back door of the atonement has no basis in Scripture at all. It suffers from a number of exegetical and theological difficulties (e.g., How is the removal of the guilt and pollution of sin attained without regeneration and faith? Why would Jesus' death only restore human ability and yet not forgive all sins, past, present and future? If the merits of Christ's death are applied at birth, then why is faith, conversion and repentance needed later on? If Jesus' death is universally applied, then why is there not a universal salvation? Wesley has placed free will in a citadel of iron at the expense of the atonement. His system is arbitrary; has no biblical proof and is irrational.).

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<sup>10</sup> As quoted in David N. Steele, Curtis C. Thomas, S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, and Documented* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed [1963] 2004), 5-6.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:327.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1958), 421.

Although Arminianism was condemned by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) and was soundly and thoroughly refuted by Scripture, it spread throughout the whole world; permeated every branch of Protestantism; and came to thoroughly dominate modern evangelicalism and fundamentalism. Because of Arminianism's affinity with semi-Pelagianism, Romanism and humanism, the sharp antithesis that once existed between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism has in recent years been greatly obscured (e.g., In 2005, when the Pope died, several "evangelical" leaders spoke of his greatness, piety and orthodoxy.).

### **The Biblical Evidence for the Bondage of the Will**

The one thing that Pelagianism, semi-Pelagianism, Arminianism and Roman Catholicism have in common is the idea that after the fall man still has the ability to think, do or will spiritual good; that man still has a "free will." "This is the Helen whom they so ardently love and for whom they do not hesitate to fight as for their altars and firesides."<sup>14</sup> Such a view shades their whole doctrine of salvation. Therefore, it is extremely important that we carefully establish the biblical teaching that man's heart is spiritually dead because of the fall and so thoroughly corrupt spiritually that the unsaved sinner is dead, blind and deaf to the things of God.

In order to deal with the question of "free will" we need to carefully define two terms. First, what do we mean when we speak of the human will? Second, how do we define the freedom that is attributed to this will? These questions are important because: (a) Many people assume that the will is some entity that is independent of the human heart; (b) The Augustinian or Calvinistic position is almost always misrepresented by Arminians as holding that men are mere robots. We will see that the Bible upholds the validity and freedom of man's decisions as secondary agents; yet, also teaches that every person's choices are determined by the heart.

Although there are many different definitions of the term will, this term in the context of the debate over free choice or determination refers to volition or a choice of the mind. When people discuss the soul or heart of man they often will speak of different aspects of the soul such as the intellect, the emotions and the will. Indeed, it is proper to think of the will as a function or part of the human mind. Therefore, as we consider the subject of "free will" we must not separate the will from the intellect or mind as if it has some independent power. The debate over "free will" cannot be settled unless we understand that the will always decides in accordance with the mind or, as Scripture puts it, the inclinations of the heart (Pr. 4:23; Lk. 6:45; Mt. 7:17, 21). "[T]he decision of the intellect is terminated in the will, so the liberty of the will has its roots in the intellect."<sup>15</sup>

For example, when a man decides to go to the refrigerator to get a piece of pizza, he exercises his will. This act of the will, however, did not occur spontaneously or in a vacuum. Before the act of the will, the mind received hunger pangs from the stomach; the mind thought about the food options available; the mind decided what food it preferred (this choice was based in part on culture, habit, availability and ease of preparation) and this choice terminated with an act of the will. The will had a prior reason, argument and motivation to get the pizza. If that person's mind did not like onions but did like pepperoni, then that person would never choose onion pizza but rather would always choose pepperoni pizza in such an incident. The man's will was free to choose onions; but his will was subservient to this mind which did not like onions. The mind chose something else instead. Similarly, a lion in Africa is free to eat grass when it is

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<sup>14</sup> Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992), 1:659.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:662.

hungry. But it never does so because lions, by nature, are carnivorous. Their minds crave meat. A water buffalo is also free to eat whatever it desires. But it only chooses grass because it is in the buffalo's nature to do so.

Now that we have an understanding of the will (that the human will is not an independent force but rather always follows the mind) we can begin to understand human freedom. On the one hand, we can, in accordance with Scripture and experience, affirm that man is truly a free agent. As beings which are created in the image of God with rationality and intelligence, men are valid secondary agents that are free to make choices. Men are not puppets, robots or impersonal machines. Men have the ability to observe, evaluate, deliberate in the mind and then choose between a, b, c, or d. Men are not coerced by anything outside of themselves to choose something they do not want to choose. If this is a person's definition of "free will," then we can agree and say that people have a free will. Unfortunately, this definition is not what the proponents of "free will" have in mind.

While in one sense we can say that man has a free will (i.e. men are free to choose and are not coerced by outside forces), in another sense we can say that man's will is not free. Men are free to choose whatever they want; but, because of the fall, man's heart or soul is thoroughly corrupt. If, as we have previously demonstrated, the will always follows the mind or heart, then a corrupt heart will not and cannot choose spiritually good things. The will of man always acts in accordance with his sinful nature. This is not simply the opinion of someone like Augustine, Luther or Calvin, but is the explicit teaching of Scripture. Jesus says, "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks" (Lk. 6:45). A man's outward life is a reflection of what is in his heart. Men speak and do evil deeds because they are, by nature, evil. Thus, Solomon warns believers, "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life" (Pr. 4:23). "For from within, out of the heart, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders..." (Mk. 7:21).

Christ says that the source of sinful thoughts and acts is the heart, not the will. The will carries out the desires, inclinations, habits, etc of the heart. Thus, in the Sermon on the Mount our Lord teaches that "a bad tree bears bad fruit" (Mt. 7:7). "Heart" in the Bible refers to the innermost core of man's being. It includes the whole human nature (i.e. the mind, will, intellect, emotions, etc). So, although man is at liberty to choose whatever he desires, since his heart is evil he will only choose between greater and lesser evil. Those outwardly good deeds that he does do are not prompted by love for God and thus are not spiritually good. "Why does the sinner choose a life of sinful indulgence? Because he prefers it, all arguments to the contrary notwithstanding, though of course he does not prefer the *effects* of such a course. And why does he prefer it? Because his *heart* is sinful."<sup>16</sup> Boettner writes, "Man is a free agent but he cannot originate the love of God in his heart. His will is free in the sense that it is not controlled by any force outside of himself. As the bird with a broken wing is 'free' to fly but not able, so the natural man is free to come to God but not able. How can he repent of his sin when he loves it? How can he come to God when he hates Him? This is the inability of the will under which man labors."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Arthur Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976 [1930]), 133-134.

<sup>17</sup> Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed [1932] 1979), 62.



## Total Depravity

Because the Bible describes fallen man's heart as thoroughly wicked and corrupt, theologians refer to man as totally depraved. This doctrine does not mean that man is as wicked as he could be. Obviously, there are some men that are more wicked than others. The pagan man who works hard to support his family, who is faithful to his wife, who obeys the civil laws, is much better than a hardened criminal or serial murderer. Further, this teaching does not mean that an unsaved man cannot do good deeds. Jesus Himself acknowledged that evil men could give good gifts to their children (Mt. 7:11). Also, contrary to certain false misrepresentations, this doctrine does not mean that the image of God in man in the broader sense is destroyed. Man still has reasoning capacities and a conscience that discriminates between good and evil. Man has an active spirit that creates beautiful works of art, music, architecture, engineering and makes great strides in science and technology.

What total depravity does mean is that man's inherent corruption extends to every part of man's nature. Because of the fall man's whole being or heart is in rebellion against God. "Everything that unregenerate man does or thinks is undergirded by rebellious inclinations against God or motivations that are sinful."<sup>18</sup> Since the fall man's whole nature has been polluted by sin. As a result man has an innate hostility toward God and spiritual truth. Paul tells us that *all men* (apart from a prior work of special grace) suppress the truth about God in creation and replace God with idols (Rom. 1:21-25). Man's mind or will is not neutral or a blank state at birth, but is evil. "The imagination of a man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21). "The wicked...go astray as soon as they are born speaking lies" (Ps. 58:3). "We were by nature the children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3). "The heart is deceitful above all things, who can know it" (Jer. 17:9)? Consequently, men are actuated by wrong principles. The natural man's thoughts, words and deeds are corrupt, because they all flow from a corrupt source. Thus, unregenerate man cannot choose nor do *spiritual* good. He cannot generate the love of God or Christ in his heart and he cannot do anything meriting salvation. It is for this reason that Paul, writing under divine inspiration, can say that not even one man in the whole world "seeks God" (Rom. 3:11).

The fact that men can do outward good deeds or what theologians refer to as "civic goodness" does not in any way contradict the doctrine of total depravity. The Bible teaches that if a man's thoughts or deeds are to be truly good in the spiritual sense, they must flow from a true love of God and His glory. They must originate from a heart that has been spiritually reborn by the power of the Holy Spirit. An unbeliever may work at a soup kitchen or donate to charity to feel good about himself or impress his friends. But, he never does these things in Christ's name to glorify God. The unbeliever (whether he is aware of it or not) does "good deeds" with selfish, humanistic, evil motives. To the unregenerate man, even religion is something for man's glory (anthropocentric), to make himself feel good; or to receive glory from other men (cf. Gal. 6:12-13).

The fact that man is inherently corrupt or totally depraved explains why the Bible teaches that spiritual goodness can only be founded upon faith in the triune God of Scripture. The author of Hebrews says that "without faith it is impossible to please Him" (11:6). Paul says, "Whatever is not from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). Unbelievers cannot do anything that is well pleasing to God simply because they do not have faith in God or His Word. They continually suppress the truth about God in order to serve their own sinful lusts (Rom. 1:18-32). Because everything the

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<sup>18</sup> Leonard J. Coppes, *Are Five Points Enough? The Ten Points of Calvinism* (Manassas, VA: Reformation Education Foundation, 1980), 44.

unbeliever does is rooted in his wicked heart and actuated by corrupt principles, Solomon can say that even “the plowing of the wicked [is] sin” (Pr. 21:4).

True faith in Christ, which issues forth from a regenerate heart, is the foundation of genuine virtue. An act which is outwardly good, but done in the service of self and Satan cannot please God. “The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:7-8).

### **Man’s Spiritual Inability**

The doctrine of total depravity is intimately connected to the biblical teaching regarding man’s total inability. Since the corruption of sin extends to every part of man’s nature and men have hearts that are hostile to God and spiritual truth, men do not have the spiritual power or discernment to savingly embrace Christ or believe the gospel. Berkhof writes, “When we speak of man’s corruption as total inability, we mean two things: (1) that the unrenewed sinner cannot do any act, however insignificant, which *fundamentally* meets with God’s approval and answers to the demands of God’s holy law; and (2) that he cannot change his fundamental preference for sin and self to love for God, nor even make an approach to such a change. In a word, he is unable to do any spiritual good.”<sup>19</sup> The Westminster Confession of Faith describes total inability as follows: “Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto” (9:3). Gordon Clark writes, “...Adam’s ability to will what is good was lost by the fall. From that time on man could not choose to will ‘any spiritual good accompanying salvation.’ True, a man might will to be honest, to support his family, to discharge most of his obligations as a citizen. In colloquial language these things are called good. But they are not spiritual goods, and they have nothing to do with salvation. Furthermore, a man cannot will to be saved. He cannot convert himself, nor even make preparation for conversion. The simple reason is that he is dead in sin.”<sup>20</sup>

The doctrines of total depravity and spiritual inability are foundational to one’s understanding of the nature of Christ’s redemptive work. If men are dead in sin, helpless, spiritually blind and cannot believe in Christ; then the salvation of sinners, of necessity, involves much more than Christ dying for all men and then waiting passively to see who will accept His gift. If unsaved men are unable to choose or to will any spiritual good, then, apart from a spiritual rebirth, no man would choose Christ. If the doctrine of total inability is true, then Christ’s death not only removed the guilt of sin and God’s curse against sinners, but also must be the foundation and guarantee of the *application* of His work to specific individuals. Thus, salvation must be a supernatural work of God from beginning to the end. All synergistic views (semi-Pelagianism, Arminianism, Romanism) must be rejected in favor of a monergistic view of salvation (Augustinianism, Calvinism).

The common evangelical view is that Christ, by His death, made salvation *possible* for all men; that forgiveness is there waiting for men to receive; that the Holy Spirit may gently urge men to change, but cannot interfere with man’s free will. In other words, the sovereign almighty Spirit of God can only do what the sinful, corrupt, depraved will of man allows Him to do. Man is in charge of the application of redemption, not God. But, we ask, can the Arminian position be true biblically or even be logical if men are spiritually dead and don’t simply need a gentle push

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<sup>19</sup> L Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 247.

<sup>20</sup> Gordon Clark, *What Do Presbyterians Believe?* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1965), 109.

or a little medicine? What if men need a spiritual heart transplant, a spiritual resurrection, a quickening? The diagnosis determines the nature of the remedy.

A biblical understanding of man's state after the fall ought to cure us of the sinful and somewhat blasphemous notion that a thrice holy God has associated Himself with sinful depraved man as *only a minor partial cause* of a sinner's salvation. The fact that the natural man is a spiritual corpse without any ability to seek God or take even one step toward Jesus means: that regeneration must precede and not follow saving faith; that God works directly upon the human soul in salvation; that Christ is not passively waiting, but is actively saving His people. An understanding of the fall leads to the doctrine of salvation by the grace of God alone. Salvation is totally a work of God. Man does not have the ability to contribute anything to his own salvation; even faith and repentance are gifts from above (Eph. 2:8; Phil. 2:13; Ac. 5:31, 11:18). Therefore, let us bow the knee to Christ and give our precious Redeemer all the glory for our salvation.

Since the doctrines of total depravity and inability are so important as they relate to our understanding of salvation, let us carefully consider the biblical evidence for these teachings. We will see that the biblical evidence for these doctrines is overwhelming. What follows is a summary of the biblical teaching regarding the state of fallen unregenerate man.

### *1. The Unregenerate are Spiritually Dead*

In Genesis 2 God told Adam that if he ate the forbidden fruit, that very day he would most certainly die (vs. 16-17). In this passage Jehovah was speaking of spiritual death which refers to the dissolution of man's union with God and its consequences. In Romans 5:12 and following, Paul says that because of Adam's sin spiritual death spread to the whole human race. In Ephesians the apostle says that everyone (except Christians who have been born again or made [spiritually] alive by God) is dead. "And you He made alive, who were once 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 [Christians] all once conducted ourselves in the lust of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (2:1-5, cf. Col. 2:13).

In this passage Paul makes it clear that everyone who is spiritually dead is a slave of sin, the flesh or the corrupt human nature. All persons who are spiritually dead are in a state of subjection to Satan and live in a continual state of condemnation. Not only their specific sins, but their *very nature* makes them "children of wrath." The apostle also teaches that spiritual death is the universal state of all men apart from Christ. According to God's infallible Word, the state of spiritual death can only be remedied *by a direct act of God* upon the human heart, a spiritual quickening. This fact is totally at odds with the common modern evangelical notion that unregenerate man has the ability to choose Christ. According to Paul, regeneration must *precede* saving faith.

Paul, under divine inspiration, used the word "dead" for a reason. There is no middle ground between being alive and being dead. Unregenerate men are not just sick, handicapped or impaired, but dead. Clark writes, "A certain Bible professor, whom I knew only too well, explained to his classes that man was spiritually sick, that Christ had provided the remedy in the

corner store, and that we must drag ourselves there, take the medicine and so regain our health. This is utterly unscriptural and anti-Christian. The Bible in many places tells sinners that they are dead and must be resurrected. No medicine in a drug store ever brought a dead man back to life.”<sup>21</sup> Obviously, a man who is spiritually dead can no more see spiritual truth or choose Christ than a rotting corpse can play tennis or debate philosophy. A Christian can quote Scripture and speak the gospel to an unsaved person from morning until late in the evening. But, if the gospel message is not accompanied by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, that person will not believe. “You may use all human persuasion possible, but you cannot give spiritual life where death reigns. God alone, by a creative act, can bring life out of death. Spiritual arguments to an unregenerate man are only warm clothes to a corpse.”<sup>22</sup> “If a man is dead spiritually, therefore, it is surely equally as evident that he is unable to perform any spiritual actions, and thus the doctrine of man’s moral [or spiritual] inability rests upon strong Scriptural evidence.”<sup>23</sup>

## 2. *The Unregenerate Cannot Understand or Receive Spiritual Truth*

The Lord Jesus Christ taught that the human nature is so thoroughly ruined and corrupted by the fall that the Holy Spirit must *first* radically change it before a person can understand and embrace spiritual truths. “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see [comprehend, perceive] the kingdom of God’” (Jn. 3:3). As the man who is born blind has no power to see, the unregenerate man whose mind is spiritually darkened (Eph. 4:18; 5:8), whose heart is made of stone and devoid of spiritual sense (Ezek. 36:26), cannot know spiritual truth or do anything spiritually good.

Therefore, Paul could declare, “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). The apostle tells us plainly that the natural man (that is, the unregenerate person who is devoid of the Spirit of God) does not receive any spiritual truths from God at all because he regards such things as foolish, stupid, absurd or ridiculous. Such a person may take a Bible class and give accurate answers on a test regarding the crucifixion, the resurrection and even the doctrine of salvation. However, he does not regard any of these doctrines as true; and, he will not embrace these teachings, but rather ridicule them. Why? Because, as Paul says, such things are “spiritually discerned.” That is, they can only be discerned or truly understood and lovingly embraced by a person in whom the Spirit of God dwells.

When our Lord confronted the unbelieving, self-righteous Jews He said, “Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My Word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do” (Jn. 8:43-44). In this passage Jesus explains why the unbelieving Jews repeatedly misunderstood His language. The reason is that these Jews did not have the spiritual or moral ability to hear His word, message or doctrine. The word “hear” (KJV) is a Hebrew idiom which means to receive, believe or obey. These wicked men repeatedly twisted the meaning of the Savior’s speech and refused to believe and submit to His doctrine because they were unable to do so. Why? Christ tells us that they did so

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<sup>21</sup> Gordon Clark, *Ephesians* (Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1985), 57-58.

<sup>22</sup> W. E. Best, *Regeneration and Conversion* (Grand Rapids: Guardian), 11. “Man can no more turn to God than the dead can sit up in their coffins. He can no more originate a right desire than he can create a universe. God and God the Holy Ghost alone, by sovereignty, special interference, calls dead sinners to life, and ‘creates’ within them the desires of their hearts” (George Sayles Bishop, *The Doctrines of Grace*, 147).

<sup>23</sup> Warburton, *Calvinism*, 48, as quoted in Loraine Boettner, *Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 66.

because they were of the devil. They had a devilish nature. “Identity of inner passions and desires established spiritual descent: they are *constantly* desiring (present continuous tense) to carry out the wishes (desires, yearnings) of the devil; so he must be their father.”<sup>24</sup> Like their father whose desires can only be for evil and against all spiritual goodness, the unregenerate Jews hated the Messiah and His message. Obviously, then, if a man is to embrace Jesus, God must first change his nature. Regeneration must precede faith. Now we can understand Paul when he says, “The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile. Therefore let no one boast in man” (1 Cor. 3:20-21).

### *3. The Unregenerate Cannot Please God*

If a person defines “free will” as an unsaved man’s autonomous ability to choose Christ, then we must ask a few simple questions. Is choosing the Savior a good thing or a bad thing? Obviously, it is a good thing. Does choosing Jesus please the Father? Of course it does. If the unregenerate human will is capable of choosing God’s Son and this choosing pleases God, then how are we to interpret Paul’s explicit statement that unbelievers *cannot* do anything that pleases God? “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:5-8).

Paul teaches that people who are unregenerate live according to the flesh (that is, their sinful depraved human nature). Further, their minds, by nature, are focused on the things of the flesh. Why is this so? Because, by nature, the carnal or unregenerate mind hates God and always takes a position of hostility toward Him, His Son and His Word. Luther writes, “Let the guardian of ‘free will’ answer the following question: How can endeavors towards good be made by that which is dead, and displeases God, and is enmity against God, and disobeys God, and cannot obey him?”<sup>25</sup> Murray writes, “Here we have nothing less than the doctrine of the total inability to be well-pleasing to God or to do what is well-pleasing in his sight. In the whole passage we have the biblical basis for the doctrine of total depravity and total inability. It should be recognized, therefore, that resistance to these doctrines must come to terms not simply with the present day proponents of these doctrines but with the apostle himself. ‘Enmity against God’ is nothing other than total depravity and ‘cannot please God’ nothing less than ‘total inability.’”<sup>26</sup>

### *4. The Unregenerate Cannot Come to Christ*

Two passages that speak very clearly on the issue of human inability come directly from the lips of Jesus Christ in the gospel of John. The Savior said, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (6:44). “I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father” (6:65). There are a number of things that both these passages have in common. First, they both begin with a universal negative (“no one”). This means that what our Lord says applies to every human being. Not one sinner is excluded.

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<sup>24</sup> William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954), 2:60.

<sup>25</sup> Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, translated by J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Cambridge: James Clark, 1957), 300.

<sup>26</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 1:287.

Second, the word “can” refers specifically to human ability. In Greek the passage literally reads: “No one *is able to come to Me*.” Jesus assures us that not even one person has the moral or spiritual power, strength, wisdom or ability to come to Christ. Why is this true? Because, when man fell, every part of his being was corrupted by sin. Man’s heart is darkened. His will is enslaved to sin. His carnal mind is at enmity with God. Man cannot embrace that which he hates. Man can no more come to Christ than can water flow uphill. Thus, the world cannot receive the Spirit of truth (Jn. 14:17). “[M]an likes to think that his salvation is in his own power. Such notions are flatly contradictory to the text before us. The words of our Lord here are clear and unmistakable, and cannot be explained away.”<sup>27</sup> “To predicate the freedom of the will is to *deny* that man is totally depraved. To say that man *has* the power within himself to either reject or accept Christ, is to *repudiate* the fact that he is the captive of the Devil.”<sup>28</sup> It is to totally contradict Paul when he says there is not one good thing in the flesh (Rom. 7:18); there is not one who does good (Rom. 3:12); there is none who seeks God (Rom. 3:11). Further, it explicitly contradicts this teaching of the Son of God.

Third, the word “unless” signifies that before any person can come to Jesus something must occur *first* that will make that coming possible. There are no exceptions. Because man does not have the power or ability in and of himself to come to the Savior, God must do something so that certain people will come. In this passage Christ explicitly contradicts the Arminian notion that sinful man and not God is the ultimate decider of who will or will not be saved. God is sovereign over salvation. “Man never of himself begins with God. God must first begin with man.”<sup>29</sup> “So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy” (Rom. 9:16). When Jesus said, “Without Me you can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5), He really meant nothing. Luther writes, “It is totally unheard of grammar and logic to say that *nothing* is the same as *something*; to logicians, the thing is an impossibility, for the two are contradictory!”<sup>30</sup> Turretin concurs: “He does not say, without me ye can do little or can do something with difficulty, but without me ye can do nothing. He does not say, without me ye do nothing or will do nothing, but ye can do nothing (which excludes not only the act, but the power itself)...Now why should the Holy Spirit so often [e.g., 1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 3:5; Rom. 8:7; Mt. 7:18; Jn. 6:44; etc] insist upon that impotence except to take away from man all power to good and ascribe to grace alone the entire work of regeneration and salvation?”<sup>31</sup>

Fourth, God is the only one who can give sinful depraved men the ability to come to Christ. One passage (Jn. 6:65) says that in order for a man to come to Jesus, it must first be granted to him by God. This means that the ability to come to Christ is a gift from God. If man already had this ability, or if man had a free will spiritually, then our Lord could not make such a statement. Therefore, the common evangelical notion that salvation is like a cup of medicine that is of no use whatsoever until a person accepts the cup and drinks it is unscriptural. The Bible teaches that the work of Christ is a gift and the ability to understand and savingly embrace the Savior and His redemption is also a gift. This means that God “in his saving operations, deals not generally with mankind at large, but particularly with the individuals who are actually saved.”<sup>32</sup> This teaching explains why the Bible calls both faith (Eph. 2:8; Phil. 1:29; 2 Pet. 1:2-3; Jn. 6:44,

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<sup>27</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: St. John*, 1:388.

<sup>28</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, [1945] 1975), 1:337-338.

<sup>29</sup> J. C. Ryle, 1:389.

<sup>30</sup> Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 262.

<sup>31</sup> Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1992), 1:674.

<sup>32</sup> B. B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 87.

45, 65) and repentance (Ac. 11:18; 16:14; 2 Tim. 2:25) gifts from God. If man could generate his own faith or if man only needed a little assistance from God, then the ability to come would not be a gift.

The Lord's statement in John 6:44 helps us to understand why the ability to come to Christ is a gift. Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." God actively does something to a sinner *before* he will come to the Savior. This activity is described by the word "draw." What exactly does this word "draw" mean?

Before we go to Scripture to give the biblical definition of this word let us consider some common misconceptions regarding its meaning. A very common understanding of "draw" in John 6 is that it refers to a gentle wooing of the sinner on the part of God. The Father is attempting to entice men to come to Jesus but they can resist this divine activity. This is essentially the view of John Wesley. He writes, "No man can believe in Christ, unless God gives him power. He draws us first by good desires, not by compulsion, not by laying the will under any necessity; but by the strong and sweet, yet still resistible motions of his heavenly grace."<sup>33</sup> In other words, God's power or grace is applied to sinners but the human will is really the ultimate deciding factor in salvation. This is the typical Arminian interpretation. God's grace is necessary for a man to come; but, it is not sufficient to guarantee a man's coming. This interpretation not only explicitly contradicts the biblical definition of the word "draw" (as we shall see in a moment), but also completely contradicts the immediate context. Note the promise our Lord attaches to His statement about God's drawing power. Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; *and I will raise him up at the last day* (Jn. 6:44, italics added). According to the sinless Son of God the drawing activity of the Father always results in a resurrection unto life.

Further, earlier in the same discourse Christ said that a person cannot come to Him unless he is given to Him by the Father; and, the all who are given *will certainly come*. "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out" (Jn. 6:37). This whole statement presupposes that God's granting and drawing power are irresistible. If the Arminian interpretation was true then our Lord could not make such promises. If Wesley's interpretation was true the passage would read, "All that the Father gives Me who of their own free will cooperate with God's grace and do not resist and reject it will come to Me." Unfortunately Wesley and his Arminian followers have a bad habit of following their own humanistic presuppositions instead of the clear teaching of God's infallible Word.

Another interpretation ascribes the drawing power of the Father to the Word of God itself. The idea is that the Holy Spirit operates upon the heart of man through the Word and entices the sinner to embrace the Savior. While there is no question that the Holy Spirit can accompany and apply God's Word to convict men of sin, to convert hearts (cf. 1 Pet. 1:23; Ja. 1:18), and sanctify believers (cf. Jn. 17:17; Ps. 119), one cannot ascribe the conversion of one person over another to the influence of the Word *alone*. For, if the Spirit operated through the Word alone and all were equally drawn by the use of the Word, then it ought to have the same effect upon all. Yet many men reject the Word and others heartily embrace it. The difference lies in those who hear the Word and are regenerated and effectually drawn to Christ by the Holy Spirit. With the unregenerate the Holy Spirit must work *immediately* upon the human soul before He works *mediately* through the preached word. As noted above, Christ says this drawing power is irresistible. It always results in a resurrection unto life. This means that the Holy Spirit operates on some men and passes others by. While man is the architect of his own damnation,

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<sup>33</sup> John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), Vol. 1, n. p.

(contrary to Arminianism) he is not the architect of his own conversion. How could he be? He is dead in trespasses (Eph. 2:1-5), helpless (Ezek.16:4-6), spiritually blind (1 Cor. 2:14) and cannot repent (Jer. 13:23). Further, Paul says that the Word apart from the converting-drawing power of the Holy Spirit brings death (Rom. 7:10). It only brings greater judgment, not life (2 Cor. 2:14-16).

All Arminian and semi-Pelagian concepts of grace are utterly destroyed by the biblical meaning of the word *draw*. “The Greek word used here is *elko*. Kittle’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* defines it to mean to compel by irresistible superiority. Linguistically and lexicographically, the word means to ‘compel.’”<sup>34</sup> This word means much more than a mere moral influence of the Word, or a gentle wooing by the Father. God does not merely woo, beg, beckon, or attempt to influence, He compels with divine power. Hendriksen writes, “The same verb (*elko, elkuo*) occurs also in 12:32, where the drawing activity is ascribed to the Son; and further, in 18:10; 21:6, 11; Acts 16:19; 21:30; and Jas. 2:6. The *drawing* of which these passages speak indicates a very powerful—we may even say, an *irresistible*—activity. To be sure, man resists, but this resistance is ineffective. It is in that sense that we speak of God’s grace as being irresistible. The net full of big fishes is *actually drawn* or *dragged* ashore (21:6, 11). Paul and Silas are *dragged* into the forum (Acts 16:19). Paul is *dragged* out of the temple (Acts 21:30). The rich *drag* the poor before the judgment-seats (Jas. 2:6). . . . Jesus *will draw* all men to himself (12:32) and Simon *drew* his sword...”<sup>35</sup> The Greek word *elko* means what it means. All attempts to deny the meaning of this term are not based on Scripture, but on humanistic concepts of fairness that are imposed on the text.

Arminians reject the plain meaning of the text because they believe that it would violate the idea that man has a free will. But this objection fails to consider three important things. First, as we have previously demonstrated the will of man is not free in the sense that the will always follows the depraved heart which cannot do anything which pleases God. Second, the state of unregenerate man’s heart (spiritually dead, dark, blind, depraved, etc) necessitates a drawing power that powerfully effects in us to will and to do. A gentle persuasion or a wooing is ineffectual on a spiritual corpse. Thus, the Bible describes this drawing in terms of a creation, a spiritual resurrection, a quickening, a regeneration. The removal of heart of stone and replacing it with a heart of flesh (i.e. a heart with a new spiritual nature) is obviously much more radical than a gentle urging. Third, the drawing power of God should never be falsely characterized as some form of mindless coercion. God in the new birth implants a new spiritual life in the heart of a sinner which powerfully influences every aspect of that person’s being in such a manner that: (a) his will or personal responsibility is not violated; and (b) he now has an understanding and love of Christ so that he voluntarily embraces the Savior. As a flower is drawn to the rays of the sun in spring, the new heart of the regenerate person looks to Jesus with a living faith.

The biblical meaning of the word “draw” is supported by Paul in 1 Corinthians: “For who makes you to differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” (4:7)? Paul teaches that God is the one who makes the difference between those with and without Christ. The apostle explicitly rejects the whole Arminian paradigm. “And yet if after the fall the free will has still some strength by which it can dispose itself to good and admit the offered grace, man will make himself to differ from another and will have what he had not received and of which he may boast because the admission of grace (and his own act) distinguishes him from another who rejects

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<sup>34</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1986), 69.

<sup>35</sup> William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John*, 1:238.



it...Could he not glory against the unbeliever because he cooperated with the grace of God which he [the unbeliever] despised?”<sup>36</sup> The consistent Arminian allows exactly what Paul prohibits. Therefore, we must reject the synergistic notion of wooing in favor of the monergistic concept of drawing. “Salvation is of the Lord” (Jon. 2:9).

### *5. The Unregenerate Cannot Repent*

Because men are depraved by nature and spiritually dead, they in and of themselves do not have the power to repent. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then may you do good who are accustomed to evil” (Jer. 13:23). “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one” (Job 14:4). “A good tree cannot bear bad fruit” (Mt. 7:18). “They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions...having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin....It has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘A dog returns to his own vomit,’ and, ‘a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire’” (2 Pet. 2:13-14, 22). “That which is born of the flesh is flesh” (Jn. 3:6). “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:7-8).

Biblical repentance involves a change of mind regarding sin, Christ and the gospel. It involves a turning from a sinful, selfish lifestyle to the true and living God. The Arminian view is that men need some assistance from God to repent. With careful persuasion and a gentle urging by the Holy Spirit, men can repent and turn over a new leaf. This view, however, explicitly contradicts Scripture. Because man is so thoroughly corrupt, only the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit applied to man’s heart can enable a man to repent and believe. Therefore, repentance is something that must be granted to a sinner by God. “They glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life’” (Ac. 11:18). God circumcised their hearts (Dt. 30:6) and replaced their stony hearts with hearts of flesh (Ezek. 11:19). Because men are spiritually dead and hostile to God by nature, only the Holy Spirit by the miracle of the new birth can make men new creatures. This is the clear teaching of Scripture. “For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). “Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins” (Ac. 5:31). “In humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth” (2 Tim. 2:25). The whole New Testament teaches that conversion is in the hand of God, that He has the power to grant repentance unto unsaved sinners so that they become new creatures.

### *6. The Unregenerate are Under the Power of Satan*

Mankind apart from Christ is enslaved to the god of darkness and lives, breathes and thinks in terms of the great satanic lie that sin and idolatry are true freedom. “But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them” (2 Cor. 4:3-4). “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do...When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell you the truth, you do not believe Me” (Jn. 8:44, 45). “I [Jesus Christ] will deliver you [the Apostle Paul] from the Jewish people, as well as from the

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<sup>36</sup> Francis Turretin, 1:675.

Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me” (Ac. 26:17-18).

If man is bound by his sinful flesh to the prince of darkness and is blinded by Satan, then obviously his will is not free. Men who have “been taken captive by him [Satan] to do his will” (2 Tim. 2:26) can only be set free by someone stronger than Satan—Jesus Christ and His Spirit (Mt. 12:29). Because “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 Jn. 5:19), all unbelievers are children of the devil who do not practice righteousness (1 Jn. 3:10) and everyone walks “according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2), we can only be liberated by the almighty power of the Holy Spirit sent by the victorious Mediator at the right hand of Power. Thus of Jesus we read, “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:14).

### *7. The Unregenerate Dwell in Darkness*

As a result of the fall, men live in spiritual, ethical and epistemological darkness. “In Him [Jesus Christ] was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it” (Jn. 1:4-5). “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed” (Jn. 3:19-20). “The words ‘every one that doeth evil,’ mean every unconverted person, every one whose heart is not right and honest in God’s sight, and whose actions are consequently evil and ungodly. Every such person ‘hateth the light, neither cometh to the light.’ He cannot really love Christ and the Gospel, and will not honestly, and with his whole heart, seek Christ by faith and embrace His Gospel, until he is renewed.”<sup>37</sup> Unbelievers prefer the moral and spiritual darkness of sin *not* because they are simply ignorant or partially corrupt, but because they are totally depraved: every aspect of their nature hates the light. Such people cannot cooperate with grace or the Holy Spirit because their darkened natures have an innate antipathy toward the light. “People of this type resemble loathsome insects that hide themselves beneath logs and stones, always preferring the darkness....”<sup>38</sup>

When Paul sets out to demonstrate the ethical darkness, guilt and helplessness of the whole fallen human race he writes, “They became futile in their thoughts and their foolish hearts were darkened....God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting” (Rom. 1:21, 28). Pure darkness is the absence of all light. Those who are not born again dwell in spiritual darkness. How can those who are in total darkness, who hate the light, choose or cooperate with light? The unregenerate will not choose the light because he cannot choose the light. It is impossible with man. “Non-existent spiritual life cannot give being to itself. Light is not brought out of darkness, neither does love come from hate. Every seed bears its own kind. ‘That which is of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit’ (Jn. 3:6). A new creature, therefore, cannot be the product of natural power.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: St. John*, 1:167.

<sup>38</sup> William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John*, 1:44.

<sup>39</sup> W. E. Best, *Regeneration and Conversion* (Grand Rapids: Guardian), 14.

## 8. *The Unregenerate Do Not Seek God*

The idea that unregenerate men are *objectively* examining different philosophies and religions in search of the truth is totally false. Unregenerate men turn to false religions, philosophies and ideologies to escape reality, to escape from the true God. Paul says in Romans chapter one that all fallen men have a knowledge of the true God from natural revelation, but they continually “suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (v. 8). Fallen mankind did not glorify God as God (v. 21). All men became futile in their thoughts and their foolish hearts were darkened (v. 21). Further, they exchanged the true God for a variety of gross, foolish idols (v. 23). They all “exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the creator” (v. 25). We see here the historical manifestation of the fall. The degeneration and degradation of mankind into the practice of perverse, abominable idolatries is the result of falling away. False religions and perverse, demonic cultures are simply the nature of man externalized. Such men do not cooperate with grace or with God’s Spirit, but suppress the truth and run to their idols. Such men need new hearts.

Thus the Psalmist could write, “The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, they have all together become corrupt, there is none who does good, no not one” (14:2-3). Apart from Christ and His sovereign saving power, men are wicked (Ps. 51:5, 58:3), slaves of sin (Jn. 8:43; Rom. 6:12, 14), evil (Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Eccl. 9:3; Jer. 17:9; Mk. 7:21-23; Jn. 3:19), filthy or corrupt (Ps. 14:2); vile (Nah. 1:14), dross and refuse (Ps. 119:119); swine (Mt. 7:6); vipers (Mt. 3:7); devils (Jn. 6:70) and haters of Christ (Jn. 15:18).

Paul says that men are noetically blind, with no understanding, with absolutely no movement toward God. “There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God” (Rom. 3:11). Why is it that not even one man seeks after God? It is because men *cannot* seek God. Luther writes, “Do we not know what it means to be ignorant of God, not to understand, not to seek God, not to fear God, to go out of the way and to be unprofitable? Are not the words perfectly clear? And do they not teach that all men are ignorant of God and despise God, and moreover go out of the way after evil, and are unprofitable for good? Paul is not here speaking of ignorance in seeking food, or of contempt for money, but of ignorance and contempt of [true] religion and godliness.”<sup>40</sup> Because of the fall and our corrupt natures men seek happiness in everything except God. Those who seek God do so only because God first sought them out and changed their stony hearts into hearts of flesh: “I [God] was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me” (Rom. 10:20, cf. Isa. 65:1).

## 9. *The Unregenerate are Helpless*

Jesus died for His people when they were unable to obey Him; when they were without any ability to save themselves, cooperate with grace, or make any move toward God. “For when we were still without strength [i.e. helpless, powerless], in due time Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom. 5:6). The apostle points to our inability to magnify the grace of God and stimulate our love toward the Savior. Our salvation depends not on our ability, for we have no spiritual ability, but upon the love and grace of God. Arminian doctrine contradicts this passage by asserting human ability and by making this cooperation *the ultimate cause* of salvation. Such a view of faith as self-generated makes choosing Christ an act that merits salvation. Such a view is the

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<sup>40</sup> Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, 280.

philosophical cousin to Romanism. God through Ezekiel describes our total helplessness in terms of a newborn abandoned in a field to die in the hot sun. “And when I [God] passed you by 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!’” (Ezekiel 16:6). Paul says plainly that our ability does not arise from within ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God (2 Cor. 3:5). If we are to will that which is spiritually good, God must make us willing by His Spirit.

#### *10. The Unregenerate have Uncircumcised Hearts of Stone*

The Bible uses the expression “uncircumcised heart” to describe an unregenerate heart still enslaved to the filth and pollution of the flesh. “Thus says the Lord God: ‘No foreigner, uncircumcised in heart or uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter My sanctuary’” (Ezek. 44:9). “You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears” (Ac. 7:51). “Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh” (Ezek. 11:19). A heart of stone is totally unresponsive to spiritual truth. An unregenerate man will no more respond to the gospel than will a rock. “Moreover, God wished to give a plain symbol of this thing in the writing of the law upon stony tables to intimate that the law is borne in a stony heart and cannot turn it (because devoid of the Spirit); but the gospel is borne in the fleshly tables of the heart because, animated by a life-giving spirit, it renews hearts and turns to them to obedience (2 Cor. 3:3).”<sup>41</sup> Regeneration is absolutely essential if fallen man is to believe. Note that God sovereignly bestows the new birth: “I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezek. 36:26). “The wind blows where it wishes... So is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (Jn. 3:8).

#### **Conclusion**

Arminians believe that God has made forgiveness available through Christ and now is waiting for men to exercise their free will to cooperate with grace and appropriate the redemption provided. It is as though there is a pot of gold sitting there waiting for man to discover it. The idea that Jesus can or will save only those men who of their own “free will” are willing to accept Him completely contradicts what the Bible says about the effect of total depravity upon the human race. All men are dead spiritually (Eph. 2:1-5); hate the truth and hate Jesus Christ (Jn. 3:19-21); are at enmity with God (Rom. 8:7-8); dwell in darkness (Jn. 1:4-5); have a heart of stone (Ezek. 11:19); are helpless (Ezek. 16:4-6; Rom. 5:6); cannot repent (Jer. 13:23); are slaves of Satan (Ac. 26:17-18); cannot see or comprehend divine truth (1 Cor. 2:14); and cannot come to Christ unless they are compelled to do so by God (Jn. 6:44, 65). This teaching is offensive to the natural man and is rejected by most churches today; but, it is unavoidable unless one is willing to abandon or completely twist the Word of God.

The doctrine of total depravity is important, for when it is properly understood, it proves that salvation is totally of God’s grace. Those who reject this doctrine and teach that the human will is the sole determining factor between who is and who is not saved have abandoned the biblical doctrine of salvation. The great theologian B. B. Warfield has pointed out that Arminians cannot even truly confess the apostle’s creed. He writes, “When one says... ‘I believe in God, the Father Almighty,’ he means it with reserve for in the domain of man’s moral choices under grace, man himself is almighty, according to God’s self-limitation in making man in his image

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<sup>41</sup> Turretin, 1:673.

and after his likeness. God himself, he goes on to declare, has a creed which begins: ‘I believe in man, almighty in his choices.’”<sup>42</sup> The Protestant Reformer Martin Luther points out that once man contributes something of his own to salvation, even one little act of the human will, grace is no more grace. He writes, “Granted that your friends assign to ‘free will as little as possible,’ nevertheless they teach us that by that little we can attain righteousness and grace; and they solve the problem as to why God justifies one and abandons another simply by presupposing ‘free-will,’ and saying: ‘the one endeavoured and the other did not; and God regards the one for his endeavour and despises the other; and He would be unjust were He to do anything else!... They [the guardians of ‘free will’] do not believe that He intercedes before God and obtains grace for them by His blood, and ‘grace’ (as is here said) ‘for grace’. And as they believe, so it is unto them. Christ is in truth an inexorable judge to them, and deservedly so; for they abandon Him in His office as a Mediator and kindest Saviour, and account His blood and grace as of less worth than the efforts and endeavours of ‘free-will’!”<sup>43</sup>

Arminianism is the first cousin to Romanism. It is a damnable heresy. If one man had the wisdom and will to choose Christ while his neighbor did not, then he has reason to boast. But if men are dead in trespasses and sins and totally unable to respond to Christ until He raises them from the dead through regeneration, then there is no reason for a man to boast. God receives all the glory. “Just as Lazarus would never have heard the voice of Jesus, nor would he have ever ‘come to Jesus,’ without first being given life by our Lord, so all men ‘dead in trespasses and sins’ must first be given life by God before they can ‘come to Christ.’ Since dead men cannot *will* to receive life, but can be raised from the dead only by the power of God, so the natural man cannot of his own (mythical) ‘free will’ *will* to have eternal life (cf. John 10:26-28).”<sup>44</sup> The gospel really *is* good news. Jesus Christ actually saves sinners.

## Chosen by God: The Doctrine of Unconditional Election

One of the fundamental doctrines that underlie the biblical teaching that men are saved by the grace of God alone is the doctrine of election. The doctrine of election refers to God’s choice of a certain number of people out of fallen humanity, who in history would receive all the merits of Christ’s redemptive work and thus be truly, actually and eternally saved. God’s choice takes place *before* creation; has absolutely nothing to do with any foreseen merit in man including a foreseen faith or repentance; and, is based solely upon God’s own sovereign good pleasure.<sup>45</sup> An excellent definition of this doctrine is set forth in the Canons of Dordt:

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<sup>42</sup> Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 84-85.

<sup>43</sup> Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 292, 305.

<sup>44</sup> Duane Edward Spencer, *Tulip: The Five Points of Calvinism in the Light of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 28.

<sup>45</sup> This study of election is limited to the doctrine of *individual* election. The Word of God also speaks of a corporate national election as was the case of Old Testament Israel (e.g., see Deut. 10:14-15). The reason that corporate election will not be considered is that national election involves the whole visible church which is composed of both wheat and tares, true believers and hypocrites, faithful saints and wicked apostates (e.g., read Mt. 3:12; 13:24, 25, 47; 7:21-23; 1 Jn. 2:19-20; 2:27; 5:4; etc). Individual election deals solely with those elected to salvation (true Israel, the invisible church, the remnant, real believers). Within the elect nation of Israel, Paul says, there is “a remnant according to the election of grace” (Rom. 11:5). In other words, in the visible church—the elect nation—there were many who were not elect individually. The reason that we must note this biblical distinction between national and individual election is that some Arminian apologists attempt to blur this distinction in order to justify universal atonement and the idea that real believers can fall away and go to hell.

Now election is the immutable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundations of the world were laid, he has, according to the most free good pleasure of his own will, of mere grace, chosen out of the whole human race, fallen by its own fault from its primeval integrity into sin and destruction, a certain number of persons, neither better nor more deserving than others but with them involved in a common misery, unto salvation in Christ; whom even from eternity he had appointed Mediator and Head of all the elect and the foundation of salvation; and therefore he has decreed to give them unto him to be saved....<sup>46</sup>

In order to emphasize the fact that God's election or choice of certain sinners to be saved is not based upon anything that the sinner himself does, Reformed theologians refer to election to eternal life as unconditional election. Because the doctrine of election has been redefined and essentially turned upside down by professing Christians since the days of the Reformation, our study will interact with and refute the popular Arminian interpretation of this doctrine. First, however, we will briefly examine the clearest, most succinct and detailed passage on election in the Bible—Ephesians 1:3ff.

### **The Apostle's Definition of Election**

The teaching that God from eternity, before the world was even created, chose a definite number of people to be saved comes from the pen of the Apostle Paul. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will" (Eph. 1:3-5). This statement is amazing and merits a careful analysis. We are told that God the Father has blessed us, that is, Christians or believers, with every spiritual blessing. These blessings are designated spiritual because they are derived from the Holy Spirit who applies Christ's perfect work of redemption to our souls. When Paul says "every spiritual blessing...in Christ" he means that every aspect of

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<sup>46</sup> First Head of Doctrine, Article 7. William Hendriksen, translator, as quoted in Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953) 2:353. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (the pinnacle of Reformed confessional thought) treats the doctrine of election under the topic of God's eternal decree. Some helpful sections of this chapter reads as follows: "V. Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of his free grace and love alone, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto; and all to the praise of his glorious grace. VI. As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore they who are elected being fallen in Adam are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit working in due season; are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power through faith unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only. VII. The rest of mankind, God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice."

redemption that Jesus accomplished for His people (justification, sanctification, adoption, glorification) is ours (i.e. true believers).

In verse four we come to the section of Paul's statement that is controversial. Paul says that all the blessings of salvation that believers have, have their source in the electing love of God the Father. Divine election is the source or origin of every Christian's salvation. The word chose (Greek, *exelaxato*) means to elect. God elected us in Christ. This word is frequently avoided or redefined in evangelical churches because if God elected some (i.e. everyone in Christ) then by logical implication others are not elected. That is, they are left by God to perish in their sins. Because many professing Christians don't think such a view is democratic or fair, they turn this passage upside down and teach that God only chooses men who first choose Him. This view will be considered in a moment.

Note that election is in Christ. The elect are chosen to be in Jesus. Everyone chosen by God will be united to the Savior (their federal head and representative) and thus will receive everything merited for them by the Mediator (regeneration, the gift of the Holy Spirit, justification, definitive sanctification, perseverance, glorification). Thus, we see that the ultimate ground of our federal union with Christ is not our faith in Jesus; but, rather, our faith in the Savior is ultimately rooted in our federal union with Christ. Although we are not actually justified until we lay hold of Christ by faith in space and time, the gifts of regeneration (Jn. 3:8; Ac. 11:18) and faith (Eph. 2:8) would not be bestowed by Christ without first the divine election of particular sinners.

Paul then gives us the time when election took place. "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world" (v. 4). Before time began, before the universe even existed, in eternity God chose those who He wanted to save in Christ. This statement tells some very important things regarding God's plan of salvation. We see that everything relating to the salvation of sinners is worked out in exhaustive detail in God's mind before the world even exists. There are no areas or pockets of chance in God's universe. He works everything according to the counsel of His own will. Nothing that happens can or will take God by surprise. What this all means is that in the salvation of particular sinners, the elect ones, there cannot be failure. Their salvation is certain. Thus, salvation is from the Lord (Jonah 2:9). Christians are not saved by anything they have done. They are not ultimately saved because they made a choice; but, because God chose them. In other words, according to His great love and mercy He saved us. What a blessed gospel! God reaches out and saves those who cannot save themselves.

This teaching is supported by verse 5, which says that God "predestined us to adoption as sons [i.e. to be part of His own family] by Jesus Christ...according to the good pleasure of His will." The word predestined (Greek, *proorisas*) means to predetermine or to determine beforehand. In context the word beforehand can only mean before the foundation of the world. The word predestined repeats the same idea as contained in verse four: "He chose us...before the foundation of the world." God decided before creation began exactly who would be a part of His saved people. Therefore, the number of the elect was set in granite before any humans even existed. To argue otherwise is to say that either God is not sovereign or that Paul, writing by divine inspiration, made a mistake. Such ideas are obviously unchristian and demonic.

God's choosing, election or predestination of those people who are to be saved is said to be "according to the good pleasure of His will" (v. 5). This means that God's choice of the elect has absolutely nothing to do with anything outside Himself. It is not based on the foreseen faith of those who would choose Christ as Wesley proclaimed. Indeed, it cannot be based on what man does because: man is dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1), spiritually blind (1 Cor. 2:14),

hostile to God (Rom. 8:6-8) and completely unable to choose spiritual good (Rom. 8:6-8; Jn. 15:5; Ps. 14:3). Therefore, God must take the initiative in saving a people for Himself and that is exactly what He does when He chooses a people in Christ. Because election has everything to do with what God does and is not at all based on man's initiative, theologians refer to it as *unconditional election*. The ground of election is God's sovereign will, not the will or choice of men who are spiritually dead and unable to believe in Christ.

The *purpose* or goal of divine election is "that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (v. 4). Commentators are divided over whether or not the word holiness in verse 4 is subjective and designates sanctification or is objective and refers to justification (i.e. Christ's perfect righteousness imputed to believers). If one believes it refers to sanctification the word "blameless" would refer to a person's sinless perfection at the final resurrection. Whatever interpretation one follows, one thing is crystal clear. Election does not open the *possibility* of salvation, but *guarantees* its actual accomplishment. Election does not make salvation possible nor does it take men part of the way to heaven; rather, it takes sinners all the way to paradise to behold the face of God. "It does not merely bring him to conversion; it brings him to perfection. It purposes to make him *holy*—that is cleansed from all sin and separated entirely to God and to his service—and faultless—that is, without any blemish whatever (Phil. 2:15), like a perfect sacrifice."<sup>47</sup> Election is a God glorifying doctrine that ought to be precious to every Bible-believing Christian.

### **The Common "Evangelical" Redefinition of Election**

The doctrine of election discussed above where God sovereignly chooses who will be saved, an election *not* conditional upon anything in man, is rejected and hated by many professing Christians in our day. Thus, they argue that election is not based upon God's choice which is founded upon His own good pleasure (as we have just seen); but, upon God's foreknowledge of man's exercise of faith. In other words, before the world was created God looked down the corridors of history and took note of every single human being who believed in Jesus and then chose them. This popular, yet strange view, essentially teaches that God does not completely control His creation; that God's "good pleasure" has no role whatsoever in choosing the elect; that God is not really sovereign over His rational creatures; that God does not really save sinners but that sinners save themselves (with some help from God) and then God simply acknowledges what man has done. The reason that "evangelicals" have turned the doctrine of election upside down to where God does not elect men, but men elect God is their doctrine of "free will." The idea that man is sovereign over his own salvation must be protected at almost any cost.

How do "evangelicals" justify their upside down version of election? They do so with a peculiar interpretation of Romans 8:29: "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." The word "foreknew" in this passage is said to simply mean that God knew something in advance. He knew before the foundation of the world which people would believe and repent and, on the basis of their actions, God chose them. There are a number of reasons why the common "evangelical" (i.e. Arminian) understanding of Romans 8:29 is unscriptural and impossible.

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<sup>47</sup> John L. Girardeau, *Calvinism and Evangelical Arminianism* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle [1890] 1984), 78.



(1) The first reason is that the word “foreknow” (*pregno*, aorist active indicative of *proginosko*) does not simply mean to have an intellectual knowledge of something before it happens. Note the following considerations:

a) In Romans 8:29 foreknowledge is placed *before* predestination, while in Acts 2:23, God’s predetermined plan (“predetermined,” from *horizo*; “plan,” *boulomai*—will, design or purpose) is placed *before* foreknowledge. “Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death.” This fact of course does not mean that Scripture contradicts Scripture, but that God’s omniscience and omnipotence are not separated, disjointed attributes. In other words, God’s decree of what comes to pass and His foreknowledge of what will occur in the future are intimately connected. Because God is all powerful, determines and controls all things, His foreknowledge is a consequence (i.e. logically, for God’s foreknowledge and decree occur simultaneously) of His eternal, fixed, counsel. God knows what will occur because He planned and ordained it.

The Ariminian idea that God looked down through time to see who would choose Him and then elected such persons implicitly denies the omnipotence and providence of God. If a human (a finite mortal) could look down the corridors of time, he would have the ability to choose people on the basis of their faith or something they did. But God who controls and sustains every aspect of creation (even subatomic particles, bacteria, viruses and insects) is not an impartial observer. He both knows *and controls*. If He sees a man believe, He gave that man the gift of faith and preordained his salvation. Calvin writes, “Peter doth teach that God did not only foresee that which befell Christ, but it was decreed by him. And hence must be gathered a general doctrine; because God doth no less show his providence in governing the whole world, than in appointing the death of Christ. Therefore, it belongeth to God not only to know before things to come, but of his own will to determine what he will have done.”<sup>48</sup>

b) Further, the word “foreknow” when used of God’s elect does not refer to a simple intellectual foresight or a knowing something cognitively before it happens, but rather refers to a selective knowledge which regards a person with favor and makes that person an object of love. In other words, in Romans 8:29 Paul uses “foreknow” in the Old Testament/Hebraistic sense of *to love* beforehand.<sup>49</sup> John Murray writes,

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<sup>48</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 1:97.

<sup>49</sup> The Bible abounds with examples of the word “know” being used to describe an intimate relationship, personal relation or love. “Now Adam knew Eve his wife and she conceived and bore Cain” (Gen. 4:1; cf. 4:17, 25; 38:26; Jdg. 11:39; 1 Sam. 1:19; etc). “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you” (Jer. 1:5). “Those who handle the law did not know Me; the rulers also transgressed against Me” (Jer. 2:8). “You only have I known of all the families of the earth” (Amos 3:2). “And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” (Mt. 7:23). “I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep” (Jn. 10:14-15). “Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal; The Lord knows those who are His” (2 Tim. 2:19). Lenski writes, “It is plain that in his omniscience God knew, knows, and foreknew all men. When Jesus says regarding the wicked on judgment day that he never knew them, and when in contrast it is so repeatedly said regarding the Lord and regarding Jesus that they know the godly, we at once see that in all these statements ‘to know,’...is used in a pregnant sense, which usage our dogmatists well define as *noscere (nosse) cum affectu et effectu*, ‘to know with affection and with a resultant effect.’ The dictionaries would do well to adopt this definition, because nothing that is more exact and to the point has been produced. Now [*epoginoskein*] dates this affectionate and effective knowing back into eternity. This is the whole story” (*The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* [Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg (1936, 45) 1961], 557).

Although the term “foreknow” is used seldom in the New Testament, it is altogether indefensible to ignore the meaning so frequently given to the word “know” in the usage of Scripture; “foreknow” merely adds the thought of “beforehand” to the word “know.” Many times in Scripture “know” has a pregnant meaning which goes beyond that of mere cognition. It is used in a sense practically synonymous with “love,” to set regard upon, to know with particular interest, delight, affection, and action (cf. Gen. 18:19; Exod. 2:25; Psalm 1:6; 144:3; Jer. 1:5; Amos 3:2; Hosea 13:5; Matt. 7:23; 1 Cor. 8:3; Gal. 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:19; 1 John 3:1)...It means “whom he set regard upon” or “whom he knew from eternity with distinguishing affection and delight” and is virtually equivalent to “whom he foreloved.”<sup>50</sup>

God’s electing love originates from Himself, not out of foreseen faith or repentance. Therefore, when the Bible discusses individual election, it always grounds it in God and not sinful, depraved humanity. Election is “according to His good pleasure” (Eph. 1:9). It is “after the counsel of His own will” (Eph. 1:11).

This interpretation of “foreknow” in Romans 8:29 is supported by the simple fact that if we accept the Arminian interpretation that God predestinated men whose future history He foreknew, then the term would prove something totally unbiblical. Why? Because God foreknows the history of every man, woman and child who ever did or will ever live. Thus, the text would teach universalism. No Arminian believes that everyone including Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin will go to heaven. It is obvious that Pol Pot, Al Capone and Heinrich Himmler have not been predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ.

The Arminian will object to the observation above by stating, “You are misrepresenting my position. I believe that only those people that God foreknew would choose Jesus are the ones He predestined to life.” To this objection we ask one simple question. Where in the text of Scripture does it say this? One can read the Bible very carefully, cover to cover, and this statement or any like it cannot be found. “Where are the words you have added, ‘Whom he did foreknow to repent, to believe, and to persevere in grace’? I do not find them either in the English version or in the Greek original.”<sup>51</sup> Sadly, Arminian theologians and interpreters are guilty of reading their own prejudices, presuppositions and humanistic traditions into the text of Scripture. While the Arminian interpretation is very popular and appeals to our fleshly egos and our human autonomy, we must reject it because it has no exegetical basis in Scripture. We must “bow to holy Scripture...not to glosses which theologians may choose to put upon it.”<sup>52</sup> Since the Arminian interpretation contradicts Scripture, is not found in the text at all and is absurd we will choose the biblical and logical alternative: that the word “know” in this passage refers to God’s saving love and favor.

c) The Arminian interpretation that the word “know” is purely intellectual is decisively refuted by the immediate context of Romans 8:29. The context of Romans 8:29 does not teach that God chooses on the basis of what man will do in the future. Paul does not say that man is ultimately sovereign in salvation. He says the exact opposite. In Romans 8:30ff the apostle

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<sup>50</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 317.

<sup>51</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon’s Expository Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 7:22.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. Girardeau writes, “The testimony in Eph. i. 4 is indisputable. Arminians are compelled to evade it. For example, Wesley says upon the text: “‘As he hath chosen us’—both Jews and Gentiles, whom he foreknew as believing in Christ.’ That is, he chose us because he foreknew that we would be holy. But Paul says just the opposite: he chose us that we should be holy. So clear is the affirmation that holiness is the effect of election, that even Meyer and Ellicott both acknowledge that the Greek infinitive rendered ‘that we should be’ is one of intention—in order that we should be holy” (*Calvinism and Evangelical Arminianism*, 69).

teaches that God's love is not a passive, helpless love that sits by and waits to see what sinful, lost, hopeless men will do; but, rather, the passage sets forth a sovereign active love, a love that nothing can impede, stop or override. Paul writes,

Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 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? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 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. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:30-39).

The interpretation that foreknowledge is merely the recognition that certain people will exercise faith sometime in the future—a faith that is solely dependent on man and that can fail at any time—simply contradicts Paul's emphasis on God's determinative action in salvation. Paul presents a chain of events, all of which are dependent solely upon God. The apostle is teaching a monergistic doctrine of salvation. That salvation depends solely upon divine choice and action. He emphasizes that God is the one who predestinates, calls, justifies, and then glorifies. Furthermore, it is Christ who achieved an objective, perfect redemption and who intercedes at the right hand of God for His people (v. 34). The three actions (called, justified, and glorified) which inevitably flow from God's eternal counsel cannot be separated. "The future glorification of the believer is designated by the aorist, as his justification, calling, predestination, and election have been; because all these divine acts are eternal, and therefore simultaneous for the divine mind. All are equally certain."<sup>53</sup> Paul emphasizes that salvation is certain for the elect because "God is for us" (v. 31).

Salvation is guaranteed by God's electing love and predestinating power. Such a doctrine is totally incompatible with the idea that everything boils down to the "free" choice of people who are "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1), who could lose their faith and salvation at any moment. Since it is God alone who saves, Paul can affirm that nothing created can separate the elect from God's love (v. 39). Nothing created—not even man's will—has veto power over the elect's final salvation. "He has shown how the present pilgrimage of the people of God falls into its place in that determinate and undefeatable plan of God that is bounded by two foci, the sovereign love of God in his eternal counsel and glorification with Christ in the age to come."<sup>54</sup> Girardeau writes, "Whatsoever, then, may be, according to the Arminian view, the love of God towards his saints, it is a love which does not secure their salvation: it is not a saving love. It is not equal to the love which a mother cherishes for her child. She would save him if she could. This reputed divine love may be called a special love, but it is not the love for his saints which the Scriptures assign to God. The idea of it was not born of inspiration: God never claimed such

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<sup>53</sup> William G. T. Shedd, *Romans*, 266.

<sup>54</sup> John Murray, *Romans*, 321.

love as his own.”<sup>55</sup> “What God is assuring his children in Romans 8:29 is not that He has foreseen our favourable response to his call when the time comes and has therefore decided that we shall duly be conformed to the image of his Son. It is rather that he loved us in anticipation and determined, for reasons entirely hidden from us, that we should be conformed to the image of his Son by an act of his sovereign grace.”<sup>56</sup> Therefore, Christians can be “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).

(2) The Arminian interpretation of Romans 8:29 contradicts the biblical teaching that salvation is by the pure grace of God. If (as modern evangelicals assert) God’s predestination of the elect is based on something that men do such as faith and repentance, then ultimately conversion is not entirely a work of God’s grace. Faith and repentance are no longer gifts of God’s grace<sup>57</sup> but are autonomous, self-generated acts of the human will. Men are no longer saved by or through faith (Rom. 3:22, 25, 28, 30; 5:1; Eph. 2:8), but rather *because* of faith. According to the Arminian interpretation “it is not God and God alone who works salvation...the actual enjoyment of salvation hangs at a decisive point upon something in man, or something done by man.”<sup>58</sup>

Martin Luther repudiates the idea that God cannot save man unless man allows Him to dispense His grace. In his exposition of 1 Peter 1:2 he writes,

V. 2a. *According to the foreknowledge of God the Father.* Peter says they are elected. How? Not by themselves, but according to the order or purpose of God. For we will not be able to raise ourselves to heaven nor create faith in ourselves. God will not permit all persons to enter heaven; he will very definitely identify his own. Here the human doctrine of free will and or our own ability avails nothing any longer. It does not depend upon our will but upon the will and election of God.

This means that you are chosen, you have not obtained it through your own strength, work or merit, for the treasure is too great, and all the holiness and righteousness of mankind far too worthless to obtain it; moreover you were heathen, knew nothing of God, had no hope and served dumb idols. Therefore, without any assistance on your part, out of pure grace you have come to such inexpressible glory, namely, only in the way that God the Father appointed you to it from eternity. Thus he presents the foreknowledge of God in a very beautiful and comfortable light, as it he should have said: You are chosen and you will indeed remain so, for God who foreknew

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<sup>55</sup> John L. Girardeau, 69.

<sup>56</sup> Arthur C. Custance, *The Sovereignty of Grace* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1981), 139-140.

<sup>57</sup> The Bible explicitly teaches that faith and repentance are not self-generated, but are gifts from God. Note the following passages. *Ephesians 2:8*, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” Paul teaches that not only are we saved by faith in opposition to works, but even our faith does not originate in ourselves. It is also a gift of God. *Philippians 1:29* says, “For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake. 2 Peter 1:2-3 reads, “Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and Godliness.” Jesus said, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me” (Jn. 6:44-45). *Acts 11:18* reads, “When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.’” *Acts 16:14* says, “Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.”

<sup>58</sup> Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 70.

you is sufficiently strong and certain that his foreknowledge cannot fail him, nevertheless so far as you believe his promise and esteem him as the true God.

From this we can in brief draw the teaching that this foreknowledge does not rest upon our worthiness and merit, as the sophists hold, for then Satan could every moment make it doubtful and overthrow it; but it rests in the hand of God, and is founded upon his mercy, which is unchangeable and eternal; consequently it is called the foreknowledge of God, and therefore it is certain and cannot fail.<sup>59</sup>

Further, Romans 9:11-18 makes it abundantly clear that election has nothing to do with what we do and everything to do with God's calling. As Paul concludes, "So then it is not of him who wills [i.e. election is not a result of men exercising their free will or choosing God], nor of him who runs [i.e. it has nothing to do with human exertion or works], but of God who shows mercy" (Rom. 9:16). As Augustine so beautifully states in his Confessions: "By your gift I had come totally not to will what I had willed but to will what you willed" (9:1).<sup>60</sup> Interestingly, one of Paul's proofs that the gospel is the power of God is that "the world through wisdom did not know God" (1 Cor. 1:21). "[T]he weakness of God is stronger than men. For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called...God has chosen, the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence...as it is written, 'He who glories, let him glory in the LORD'" (1 Cor. 1:25, 28, 29, 31).

Reformer Martin Luther understood that attributing our salvation to a human choice (i.e. "free will") ultimately destroys the grace of God:

Granted that your friends assign to "free will as little as possible", nonetheless they teach us that by that little we can attain righteousness and grace; and they solve the problem as to why God justifies one and abandons another simply by presupposing "free-will", and saying: "the one endeavoured and the other did not; and God regards the one for his endeavour and despises the other; and He would be unjust were He to do anything else!" ...They [the guardians of "free will"] do not believe that He intercedes before God and obtains grace for them by His blood, and "grace" (as is here said) "for grace." And as they believe, so it is unto them. Christ is in truth an inexorable judge to them, and deservedly so; for they abandon Him in His office as a Mediator and kindest Saviour, and account His blood and grace as of less worth than the efforts and endeavors of "free-will"!<sup>61</sup>

The apostle Paul says that the biblical doctrine of salvation completely excludes human boasting (Rom. 3:27). Yet, if Arminianism is true and some people have the wisdom and moral perception to choose Christ while others do not, then do they not have a reason to boast? If some men on the basis of their own intrinsic power and faith have caused God to choose them over others (who were unwilling), then do they not have a reason to brag? Of course they do! Therefore, Arminianism cannot be true for it repeatedly contradicts Paul's teaching. But, if men are dead in trespasses and sins and totally unable by their own will or power to respond to Christ

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<sup>59</sup> Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1982), 10-11.

<sup>60</sup> Augustine as quoted in Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 468.

<sup>61</sup> Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, Translated by J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnson (Cambridge: Jones Clark, 1957), 292, 305.

until He raises them from the dead through regeneration, then there is no reason to boast. The biblical gospel preserves the doctrines of grace of which divine election is so integral a part.

(3) The Arminian interpretation of Romans 8:29 explicitly contradicts the doctrine of original sin or man's state after the fall (e.g., total depravity and spiritual inability). If God's choice is contingent on fallen man's prior choice, then no one would be elect for Paul says, "There is none who understands...who seeks God...who does good, no not one" (Rom. 3:11, 12). The Bible teaches that unsaved, unregenerate men hate both Christ and the truth (Jn. 3:19-21). Unregenerate fallen man: dwells in darkness (Jn. 1:4-5); is dead spiritually (Eph. 2:1-5); has a heart of stone which is unable to respond to divine truth (Ezek. 11:19); is helpless (Ezek. 16:4-6); is unable to repent (Jer. 13:23); is enslaved to Satan (Ac. 26:17-18); and is unable to see or comprehend divine truth (1 Cor. 2:14). Unconditional election is the logical corollary to total depravity. Thus Jesus Christ taught: "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.... No one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father" (Jn. 6:44, 65). An unregenerate man can no more choose Christ as Savior than can a rotting corpse raise itself.

Since the Bible teaches that the fall has rendered man incapable of believing in Christ and repenting, the idea that God looked through time and chose those who first chose him is absurd and impossible. That is why the Bible teaches that faith and repentance are gifts from God (cf. Jn. 3:3-8; 6:44-45, 65; Eph. 2:8; Phil. 1:29; 2 Pet. 1:2, 3). "For unless God by sovereign, operative grace had turned our enmity to love and our disbelief to faith we would never yield the response of faith and love."<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, the biblical passages which teach unconditional election are clear and abundant.

(4) The Arminian doctrine of a conditional election is an implicit denial of the sovereignty of God. "Evangelicals" who emphatically reject the doctrine of unconditional election, foreknowledge (biblically defined) and predestination do so because they believe that God's prior sovereign choice and predestination infringes on human freedom. Consequently, the Arminian's concept of free will or human freedom becomes the presuppositional axis of their whole theological system. It completely alters their concept of God and their doctrine of salvation.

For example, the Arminian is well aware that the Bible teaches that God is sovereign (read 1 Chron, 29:11-14; 2 Chron. 20:6; Job 12:10-23; 36:32; 42:2; Gen. 45:7; 50:20; Ex. 2:1-10; 4:11, 21; 7:3, 13; 8:15; 9:12, 35; Deut. 2:30; Prov. 21:1, 30; 19:21; 20:24; Isa. 40:15-23; 14:24, 27; 46:10, 11; 45:7; Am. 3:6; Dan. 4:31-32; Jn. 6:44, 45, 67; 17:2, 6, 9, 12; 12:37-40; 15:16; Ac. 2:23; 4:28; 13:48; 16:14; 18:27; Rom. 9; Eph. 1:1ff, Ja. 1:17-18; etc).<sup>63</sup> But in order to preserve his philosophical concept of human freedom he proposes the idea of a self-limiting God. In other

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<sup>62</sup> John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 100.

<sup>63</sup> The Bible unequivocally teaches that God, according to His own good pleasure, determines the destiny of every single human being. *Psalm 75:7* says that God "puts down one, and exalts another." *1 Samuel 2:7* says, "The Lord makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and lifts up." *Deuteronomy 8:18* reads, "Remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth." *Daniel 4:17* declares, "The Most High rules in the kingdom of men, [and] gives it to whomever He will." *Daniel 2:21*, "He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding." When Pilate attempted to intimidate Christ by speaking of his great authority Jesus said in *John 19:11*, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above." The God of the Bible has providential control over all the affairs of men. If we deny this fact in order to assert human freedom, then we do not believe in the true living God with whom we have to deal. Although God is totally sovereign, man is a valid secondary agent who is responsible for all his actions. (This point is discussed below.)

words, God voluntarily limited His absolute sovereign power so that He would not intrude upon man's free will. This humanistic presupposition is foundational to the idea that man *allows* God to elect him. (In other words, in the sphere of salvation man is sovereign over God). But this self-limiting concept raises a few pertinent questions. Is it possible for God to suppress, negate or alter one of His essential attributes? Can God somehow voluntarily cease to be absolutely sovereign over certain aspects of His creation? The biblical answer to this question is absolutely not. God, the Bible tells us, cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:13). He can no more cease to be sovereign than could He lie, for to do so would be to deny Himself. The idea that God can create an area of pure contingency outside of His control is just as unbiblical and absurd as teaching that God could create some part of creation that could exist without God's sustaining power. It is simply impossible. In his zeal to protect his humanistic concept of human freedom, the Arminian must posit a God who can cease to be God.

Further, if man is to be truly free from all outside influences and forces as Arminian theology requires, then man would have to be a self-created, truly autonomous, self-sustaining being. But, that is obviously not the case. Robert L. Reymond writes,

There simply is no such thing as a will which is detached from and totally independent of the person making the choice—suspended, so to speak, in midair and enjoying some “extra-personal vantage point” from which to determine itself. The will is the “mind choosing” (Edwards). Men choose the things they do because of the complex, finite persons that they are. They cannot will to walk on water or to flap their arms and fly. Their choices in such matters are restricted by their physical capabilities. Similarly, their moral choices are also determined by the total complexion of who they are. And the Bible informs us that men are not only finite but are *now* also sinners, who by nature *cannot* bring forth good fruit (Matt. 7:18), by nature *cannot* hear Christ's word that they might have life (John 8:43), by nature *cannot* be subject to the law of God (Rom. 8:7), by nature *cannot* discern truths of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:14), by nature *cannot* confess from the heart Jesus as Lord (1 Cor. 12:3), by nature *cannot* control the tongue (James 3:8), and by nature *cannot* come to Christ (John 6:44, 65). In order to do any of these things, they must receive powerful aid coming to them *ab extra*. So there simply is no such thing as a free will which can always choose the right.<sup>64</sup>

### **Additional Biblical Evidence for Unconditional Election**

Although the evidence for unconditional election presented thus far is strong and irrefutable, there are other passages that clearly affirm this doctrine.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Robert Reymond, 353-354.

<sup>65</sup> There are so many passages that teach or at least imply the doctrine of unconditional election that we do not have the time or space to treat each passage. For further study examine the following passages. *1 Kings 19:18*, “I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal.” *Rom. 11:5-6*, “Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer of works.” *Rom. 8:30*, “Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” *Gal. 1:15-16*, “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me....” *Eph. 1:11*, “In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.” *1 Thess. 1:4*, “knowing beloved brethren your election by God.” *2 Tim. 1:8-9*, “...God who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.” *1 Peter 1:2*, “...elect according to the foreknowledge of God in the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.”

(1) In Acts 13:48 Luke says that only those men who were appointed by God to eternal life believed. “Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.” The Greek word *tetagmenoi*, which is translated as ordained (KJV, ASV, RSV), appointed (NKJV, NASB, Berkeley, Young’s Literal Translation of the Bible) and destined (JB) is the passive form of the verb *tasso* which (as might be expected) means to ordain, or to appoint. The fact that the verb is passive indicates that these people did not ordain themselves but were chosen by an outside agent—God the Father. “In the Greek, the form *were ordained* is a passive participle in the perfect tense. The perfect denotes action that took place in the past but is relevant for the present.”<sup>66</sup> God predestined the salvation of particular persons even among the Gentiles. Thus, Luke, writing under divine inspiration, explicitly endorses the doctrine of unconditional election. These people believed in Christ because God first appointed them to eternal life. Therefore, this passage explicitly contradicts the idea that election is God’s response to man’s faith. God’s choice of a person to be saved is the cause, not the effect, of that person’s faith in Christ. Therefore, God receives all the glory for our salvation and we have no reason to boast.

Why then, do some people believe and others disbelieve? According to Luke, the difference is not that some people are smarter, wiser or more holy than others, but that God has chosen or ordained some to life and passed by the rest. If you believe in Christ it is because God chose you and gave you the ability to believe by the mighty power of the Holy Spirit. God drew you to Christ and turned your stony heart into a heart of flesh. He turned your enmity toward the Savior into love and delight. God makes the unwilling, willing. Calvin writes,

[T]his ordaining must be understood of the eternal counsel of God alone....And this place teacheth that faith dependeth upon God’s election. And assuredly, seeing that the whole race of mankind is blind and stubborn, those diseases stick fast in our nature until they are redressed by the grace of the Spirit, and that redressing floweth from the fountain of election alone. For in that of two which hear the same doctrine together, the one showeth himself apt to be taught, the other continueth in his obstinancy. It is not, therefore, because God doth lighten [illumine] the former, and doth not vouchsafe the other the like grace....though our heavenly Father invited all men into the faith by the external voice of man, yet doth he not call effectually by his Spirit any save those whom He hath determined to save.<sup>67</sup>

Those who reject predestination and unconditional election have attempted to circumvent the clear meaning of this passage in two different ways. First, there are people who simply ignore the meaning of the Greek and twist the passage so that it means what they would like it to mean. Thus, the Arminian translator of the Living Bible translates Acts 13:48b as follows: “...and as many as wanted eternal life believed.” Not only does this translation completely pervert the meaning of the original Greek, but it also assumes something quite ridiculous. Apparently, those

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*Revelation 7:4*, “And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed. *James 1:18*, “Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.” The Bible also teaches a foreordination to condemnation. *Rom. 9:13, 22*, “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated....God...endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction.” *1 Peter 2:8*, “They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they were appointed.” *Jude 4*, “For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation....”

<sup>66</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 496.

<sup>67</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 1:555-6.



who did not believe did so because they did not want eternal life. In other words, they didn't believe because they preferred the eternal tortures hell over paradise. They must have been sadomasochists! Another arbitrary translation comes from the pen of the old heretic Socinius who invented his own Greek grammar to have the passage say, "...as many as believed, were ordained to eternal life." Socinius held to the view that, if the Bible doesn't say what one thinks it should, then one should switch the words around until it does.

Second, a more sophisticated method for avoiding the doctrine of foreordination is to argue that the verb is not passive but middle: "...as many as were disposed to eternal life believed." (In the Greek language passive and middle verbs have the same ending.) Such a translation must be rejected for the following reasons: a) Such a translation ignores the analogy of Scripture and the entire New Testament which teaches that God ordains or predestinates and not man (cf. Rom. 8:28-29; 9:11; Eph. 1:4; 1 Tim. 1:9; 1 Cor. 1:26-29; 1Pet. 1:2, etc). b) It ignores the context of the book of Acts which teaches that no man is able to put himself in God's debt by his own powers or works (Ac. 8:19ff; 13:39; 16:14). "[W]henver this verb occurs elsewhere, it invariably expresses the exertion of power or authority, divine or human, and being in the passive voice, cannot denote mere disposition, much less self-determination, any more than the form used in 2, 40 above..."<sup>68</sup> c) The concept of being disposed to eternal life as a cause of believing is odd and foreign to Scripture. If we define dispose as having a natural inclination towards something, then would not everyone believe? How many people are there who would say that they do not want to go to heaven, but instead have a preference for the flames of hell? The issue in Scripture is never a preference for heaven or hell, but rather one's attitude toward Jesus Christ. On this issue the Bible is crystal clear. No one has a natural disposition towards the Savior unless they were appointed to life by God and their hearts are changed by a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, one should not be surprised to discover that all the ancient translations (including the Latin Vulgate, Syriac, and Arabic as well as virtually all modern translations (Living Bible excepted) translate *tetameno* as the passive: "were ordained, or appointed." Given the biblical evidence we must heed the wisdom of C. H. Spurgeon on this passage:

Attempts have been made to prove that these words do not teach predestination, but these attempts so clearly do violence to language that I shall not waste time in answering them. I read, "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed" and I shall not twist the text but shall glorify the grace of God by ascribing to that grace the faith of every man. Is it not God who gives the disposition to believe? If men are disposed to have eternal life, does not He—in every case—dispose them? Is it wrong for God to give grace? If it be right for Him to give it—is it wrong for Him to purpose to give it? Would you have Him give it by accident? If it is right for Him to purpose to give grace today, it was right for Him to purpose it before today—and, since He changes not—from eternity.<sup>69</sup>

(2) In Romans chapter 9 Paul gives a very detailed explanation of divine election: "[F]or 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.... As it is written, 'Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.' 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,

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<sup>68</sup> J. A. Alexander, *Acts of the Apostles* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1857] 1991), 43.

<sup>69</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, quoted in George Sayles Bishop, *The Doctrines of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954), 171.

nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy” (vs. 11, 13-16). If one has ever wondered why some people become Christians and others continue in darkness, he need only read Romans 9:6-24. Paul argues that the reason some are saved and others are damned is that God so willed it. Paul says that God ultimately decides who receives mercy. Election reflects God’s will and purpose: “it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy” (Rom. 9:16).

In order to emphasize God’s sovereignty over salvation (out of the whole Old Testament), Paul chooses the twin brothers Jacob and Esau as a case study in divine election. Paul sets out to prove that election to salvation flows solely from God’s will and purpose; that one’s blood line, parentage, upbringing, actions, or human choice have *nothing* to do with election. Note that Jacob and Esau were twins. They were conceived at the same moment and born only minutes apart. Unlike the case of Isaac and Ishmael who had different mothers, one being an Egyptian slave (Hagar), Jacob and Esau had the same mother, Rebekah. Both were covenant children born of the patriarch Isaac. Their conception was a miraculous answer to prayer (Gen. 25:21). From a human standpoint, if anyone had the advantage it was Esau who was the first born (Gen. 25:25) and favored by Isaac his father (Gen. 25:28). Furthermore, in order to make it absolutely clear that election has nothing to do with human merit or choice, Paul says that God chose one to salvation (Jacob) and one to reprobation (Esau) before they were even born; before either had done good or evil. Why is it that some people believe in Christ and others do not? Because God has mercy on some and others He hardens (Rom. 9:18). Ultimately God makes the difference. Paul reasons as “plainly as language can express the idea, the ground of the choice is not in those chosen, but in God who chooses.”<sup>70</sup>

There are a number of objections that have been raised against the doctrine of unconditional election as taught by Paul in Romans 9. First, it is said that when the passage says God hated Esau, it really means that God loved him less than He loved Jacob. Although the word hate can sometimes be used in Scripture to mean to love less (e.g., Lk. 14:26), the context of the passage quoted by Paul (Mal. 1:2-3) and Romans 9 itself indicate that in this instance hate does *not* mean to love less. “The context of Mal. 1:2-3 is one of judgment, punishment, indignation: ‘...Esau have I hated, and made his mountains a desolation.... They will build, but I will throw down.’”<sup>71</sup> If Paul meant to love less, then why compare Esau to Pharaoh, whom God destroyed? God killed Pharaoh’s firstborn son and then drowned Pharaoh in the Red Sea. If a person slit the throat of your firstborn son and then drowned you in the backyard swimming pool, would you regard that person as loving you less? Also, why would Paul explain what he meant by saying that those hated beforehand are “vessels of wrath prepared for destruction” (v. 22). They are lumps formed by God for dishonor (v. 21). It is obvious that hate in Rom. 9:13 does not mean and cannot mean to love less.

Another objection is that Paul is not really referring to individual election, but the election of nations. Were not Jacob and Esau both the father of nations? Indeed they were. But the context of the passage indicates that here Paul is not at all concerned with collective or national election, but is explaining why “they are not all Israel, who are of Israel” (Rom. 9:6).

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<sup>70</sup> Charles Hodge, *Romans* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1835] 1989), 309.

<sup>71</sup> William Hendriksen, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 323. “What we find in Malachi 1:1-5 is illustrated by instances in the Old Testament where God’s hatred is mentioned and where either persons or things are the objects (cf. Psalms 5:5; 11:5; Prov. 6:16; 8:13; Is. 1:14; 61:8; Jer. 44:4; Hos. 9:15; Amos 5:21; Zech. 8:17; Mal. 2:16). The divine reaction could scarcely be reduced to that of not loving or loving less. Thus the evidence would require, to say the least, the thought of disfavor, disapprobation, displeasure” (Murray, *Romans*, 2:22).

Paul is explaining the distinction between Israel and *true* Israel. He wants his reader to understand why so many within the elect nation do not believe. This brings Paul to a lengthy discussion of individual election so that all may understand: they are not all elect (individually), who are of elect Israel (nationally). Furthermore, according to the Arminian conception of justice and fairness “is it not equally unjust of God to choose one nation and leave another? The argument which they imagine overthrows us overthrows them also. There never was a more foolish subterfuge than that of trying to bring out national election. What is the election of a nation, but the election of so many units, of so many people?—and it is tantamount to the same thing as the particular election of individuals. In thinking, men cannot see clearly that if—which we do not for a moment believe—there be any injustice in God choosing one man and not another, how much more must there be injustice in choosing one nation and not another. No! The difficulty cannot be got rid of thus, but is greatly increased by this foolish wresting of God’s Word.”<sup>72</sup>

The most common objection is: “That’s not fair!” Paul himself anticipates such a response in verse 14: “What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God?” Many people think that the doctrine of predestination, where God foreordains some to salvation and others to destruction before they are even born, is unjust. Although such a response may be natural for the unregenerate and those ignorant of theology, it should never be the response of a Christian. Paul, after posing the question, says, “Certainly not!” (v.14) Furthermore, “It is not for their being passed by that they are punished, but for their sins. Their being passed by is a sovereign act: their condemnation is a judicial act of God in His capacity as a Judge. ‘*Salvation is all of grace; damnation all of sin.* Salvation [is] of God from first to last—the Alpha and the Omega; but damnation [is] of men not of God: and if you perish at your own hands must your blood be required’ (C. H. Spurgeon).”<sup>73</sup>

Why does Paul have such an emphatic, negative reaction to the objection that divine election is unfair and unjust? Perhaps the apostle is outraged at the thought of finite sinful beings assuming they are competent to sit in judgment over the secret, eternal determinations of the triune God. “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and our children forever” (Dt. 29:29). Perhaps Paul thinks that sinners who are selfish, narrow-minded, subjective, have an ax to grind against God and understand so little about God’s justice and plan ought to keep quiet. Such people “assume that we are competent to sit in judgment on God’s government of the universe; that we can ascertain the end He has in view, and estimate aright the wisdom and justice of the means adopted for its accomplishment. This is clearly a preposterous assumption, not only because of our utter incapacity to comprehend the ways of God, but also because we must of necessity judge before the consummation of his plan, and must also from appearances.”<sup>74</sup>

Further, a fatal problem with the objection that predestination or unconditional election makes God unjust is the simple fact that all human beings, because of the sin of Adam and their own sins, *deserve* eternal damnation. “There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all gone out of the way; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one” (Rom. 3:10-13). God could justly send every human being to hell. He is not obligated to save anyone. If God had not

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<sup>72</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, sermon on Jacob and Esau, in William MacLean, *Arminianism: Another Gospel* (Gisborne, New Zealand: Westminster Standard, 1965), 16-17.

<sup>73</sup> MacLean, *Arminianism: Another Gospel*, 15.

<sup>74</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 2:350.

(because of His love) elected some to life and sent His only begotten Son to die, *no one* would go to heaven. “Shall we not fix it once for all in our minds that salvation is the right of no man; that a ‘chance’ to save himself is no ‘chance’ of salvation for any; and that, if any of the sinful race of man is saved, it must be by a miracle of almighty grace, on which he has no claim, and, contemplating which as a fact, he can only be filled with wondering adoration of the marvels of the inexplicable love of God? To demand that all criminals shall be given a ‘chance’ of escaping their penalties, and that all shall be given an ‘equal chance,’ is simply to mock at the very idea of justice, and no less, at the very idea of love.”<sup>75</sup> This explains why election is always presented in Scripture as according to God’s will and purpose and *not* man’s merit. Paul goes on to quote Exodus 33:19 in response. The key to understanding election for Paul is God’s mercy. “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’” (Rom. 9:15). What is mercy? Mercy is the unmerited or undeserved favor of God. “Compassion has to do with recognizing the poor or helpless state of a person and stooping to help that person. Mercy does the same, but its unique quality is that it is shown to people not only who do not deserve it, but who in fact deserve the opposite. In this case, mercy describes the giving of salvation to people who actually deserve to perish.”<sup>76</sup>

The Arminian thinks he is avoiding the common objection of unfairness by making the ultimate cause of election man’s choice of Christ. However, this supposed solution to the question of fairness does not really address the “problem.” The Bible clearly teaches that no one can be saved apart from Christ (Acts 4:12; Jn. 14:6; 15:5; 1 Jn. 5:12; Rom. 10:13). Yet throughout the history of mankind, very few people have had the opportunity to hear the gospel. If God was trying to meet this human, unscriptural standard of justice that under girds Arminianism, would He not give every person in history an opportunity to hear the gospel? Yet, the biblical account shows that God in the Old Covenant era focused His attention on a tiny nation in Palestine while the rest of the world was left in complete ignorance and darkness. And even in the New Covenant era, when God is gathering His elect from every nation, the vast majority of people have not heard the gospel. Paul was forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the Gospel in Asia, but rather was directed in a vision to go to Europe (Macedonia; cf. Ac. 16:6). God excluded some and focused on others. “It was the sovereign choice of God which brought the Gospel to the people of Europe and later to America, while the people of the east, and north, and south were left in darkness.”<sup>77</sup>

Also consider that God is in total control of when and where each person is born, yet some individuals are born into households where they are taught false religions and philosophies while others are born into Christian households where they hear the gospel throughout childhood. One child is born in poverty to wicked parents who worship idols, and another is born into a middle-class Christian family where Christ is taught, honored, and worshipped daily. The Bible teaches that God has the power to open and close the womb (cf. Gen. 30:2-3). God could (if He wanted to meet the Arminian standard of fairness) only allow children to be born into godly Christian households. Furthermore, some are born more intelligent, trusting, kind, etc, than others. If God’s elective choice is dependent upon the foreseen faith of man, as the Arminian

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<sup>75</sup> B. B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 80-81.

<sup>76</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 3:1070.

<sup>77</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 89. “If the Arminian theory were true, namely, that Christ died for all men and that the benefits of His death are actually applied to all men, we would expect to find that God had made some provision for the Gospel to be communicated to all men. The problem of the heathens, who live and die without the Gospel, has always been a thorny one for the Arminians who insist that all men have sufficient grace if they will but make use of it” (Boettner, 118).

asserts, then election is *unjust*, because all men are not born into equal circumstances and all are not born with equal intellectual capabilities.

The doctrine of *unconditional* election is the only view of election which is just. The whole human race is dead in trespasses and sins, and under the just sentence of eternal damnation. But God, who is merciful, chooses “according to the good pleasure of His will” (Eph. 1:5) to save some. None are deserving. None are spiritually able. None have a spiritual advantage. They all are at the same point. Then, apart from anything in them, God saves some and passes by others. This is exactly what Paul is saying when sinful, guilty humanity is compared to the “same lump.” “Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?” (Rom. 9:21) “This scripture evidences that there is ‘no difference,’ in themselves, between the elect and the non-elect: they are all clay of ‘the same lump,’ which agrees with Eph. 2:3, where we are told, that all are *by nature* children of wrath.”<sup>78</sup> “The main idea Paul is putting across is this: if even a potter has the right out of the same lump or mass of clay to make one vessel for honor, and another for dishonor, then certainly God, our Maker, has the right, out of the same mass of human beings who by their own guilt have plunged themselves into the pit of misery, to elect some to everlasting life, and to allow others to remain in the abyss of wretchedness.”<sup>79</sup>

Another fatal problem for the Arminian view of election as taught in Romans 9 is that if Paul is teaching that election is based not on God’s will, but human choice, the hypothetical objections that Paul raises to the doctrine don’t make any sense. If Esau was not elected because he did not exercise faith, why would anyone accuse God of injustice? The Arminian teaches that ultimately God had nothing to do with it. The objection raised in verse 19 (“You say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?’”) is obviously made against predestination. If (as Arminians erroneously assert) God cannot violate man’s free will, and salvation is merely a possibility which man sovereignly appropriates, why an objection against God’s absolute control of salvation and reprobation? Furthermore, the illustration developed above regarding the potter fashioning the clay solely as he pleases is also totally out of place. Unconditional election is a hated doctrine by most professing Christians today. Yet, the apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, championed the doctrine and taught it with such clarity that one can only wonder how those who profess belief in the Bible can deny it.

It is truly sad that so many who profess the name of Christ hate the doctrine of unconditional election, for it is the heart of biblical religion and God-glorifying doctrine. What is more fundamental to biblical truth than the fact that salvation is a gift from God? “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, *which God prepared beforehand* that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:8-10). Those who hate the doctrine in reality hate God’s sovereign grace. They would ignore the doctrine if they could, but since it is taught so clearly and often in the New Testament, they have no choice but to attempt to explain it away. Their main attempt—the idea that election is based on a foreseen faith—turns election into its very opposite: God does not elect man, but rather man elects God. Furthermore, *predestination* in such a scheme is really a *postdestination*. The Arminian viewpoint is unbiblical and illogical, for it makes the eternal counsel and choice of God contingent upon the choice of men who are spiritually dead and unable to choose Christ (apart from regeneration) and who do not even exist yet! The Arminian scheme has temporal events controlling and conditioning the

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<sup>78</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976 [1930]), 51.

<sup>79</sup> Hendriksen, *Romans*, 327.

eternal, unchanging will of God. In other words, the clay has control over the potter. The Arminian, by taking election out of God's hands and placing it in the hands of depraved man, has destroyed salvation by grace alone and replaced it with a humanistic synergism. Christ testified against such Scripture twisting when He said to His disciples: "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you" (Jn. 15:16). Arminianism is unscriptural, irrational, and takes the glory due to God alone and bestows it upon sinful man.

(3) In John chapter 17 which contains Christ's solemn prayer to the Father after His farewell address, we find some very profound statements on the topic of election. After Jesus prays for Himself, He prays for those chosen by the Father. "You [the Father] have given eternal life to as many as You have given Him" (v. 2). "I pray for them, I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours" (v. 9). There are some important theological statements in our Lord's words.

a) Note that Jesus receives authority over the whole human race as a result of His redemptive obedience. "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Mt. 28:18). He is the "head of every man" (1 Cor. 11:3); the "head of all principality and power" (Col. 2:10). "Christ...is gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him" (1 Pet. 3:22). The reason the Mediator receives this authority is so that He can give eternal life to those given to Him by the Father. The ascended Savior sits at the right hand of God and gives the Holy Spirit to everyone who is to be saved. "'The first man Adam became a living being.' The last Adam became a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45). Christ is sovereign over salvation and gives it only to the elect.

b) Jesus only gives eternal life to those persons given to Him by the Father. Why are the people who are to be saved described as a possession of the Father's that is given to the Son? Because, in the economy of salvation, it is the Father who chooses the elect. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as *He chose us in Him* before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:3-4). The Father takes what is His (the elect) and gives it as a love gift to the Son. "Beside the power given unto Christ over all creatures, there are a certain number of men given by the Father unto Christ in the covenant of redemption, that he may redeem, take charge of, and be forthcoming for them..."<sup>80</sup>

All men without exception are commanded to repent and believe in Jesus. But, only those men chosen by God from all eternity who belong to the Father and are given to the Son will repent, believe and obtain eternal life. "This giving of men to the Son to be redeemed and saved is the same thing with election and predestination...All the elect are given from eternity to the Son, to be redeemed by His blood; and all the redeemed are in due time drawn by the Father to the Son [Jn. 6:44], to be kept to eternal life."<sup>81</sup> Now we can understand the certainty of Christ's glorious promise in John 10:27-29, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand."

c) Note that Jesus does not pray for all men without exception, but only for the elect—those who are chosen and thus belong to the Father. The Savior prays and intercedes only for the elect and not for others because the elect are the possession of the Father. They have been given

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<sup>80</sup> George Hutcheson, *The Gospel of John* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1657] 1972), 353.

<sup>81</sup> Robert Trail as quoted in J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: John* (Cambridge, England: James Clark, 1976), 3:197.

to the Son and are Christ's also. Further, Jesus is glorified in them (v. 10). If (as Arminians assert) God is trying to save all men without exception, then why doesn't the Savior pray for all men? The answer is simple. Christ only came to save His people, the elect, His sheep. Hendricksen writes,

It is with reference to (*peri*) the elect that Jesus is making request, in order that the full merits of his redemption may be applied to them, namely to *the given ones* (see on 6:37, 39, 44; 17:6). It is for these given ones that he lays down his life (see on 10:11, 14); hence, it is also *for them*—for them *alone*—that he makes (is constantly making) this request. See also Rom. 8:34 (“he makes intercession *for us*”); Heb. 7:25 (“he ever lives to make intercession *for those who draw near to God through him*”) 9:24 (“Christ entered into heaven itself, now to appear before the face of God *for us*”); and 1 John 2:1 (“We have a Helper with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous”).

All this is particular, not universal. Nevertheless, the prayer of the Highpriest looks beyond the men who were in the Upper Room that night, as is clear from verses 20 and 21. It is wrong, moreover, to say (as is sometimes done) that Jesus prayed only for *believers*. Rather, he prayed for *all* his people, also for those who as yet did not believe in him, but were going to accept him by true faith later on (again, see verses 20, 21), as the result of sovereign grace.<sup>82</sup>

The topic of election is one that is hated and avoided by most professing Christians today. Yet our Lord's most detailed and longest prayer for His saints is incomprehensible without it. The typical “evangelical” objections to this doctrine are irrational, weak and based on human concepts of fairness, not biblical exegesis.

(4) In 2 Thessalonians, Paul gives thanks to God for his brothers who have been loved by the Lord “because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth” (2:13). When Paul wants to comfort and reassure the Thessalonians regarding their own participation in the coming deliverance on the day of the Lord he points them to divine election. They have been elected or chosen (*heilato*) by God from the beginning. “‘From the beginning’...dates this act of God's, but not at the beginning when time began; *apo*, ‘from the beginning,’ dates from that extreme point of time (the Greek always thinks forward from the farthest point) because beyond that no point of time exists. The sense is thus the same as ‘before the foundation of the world’ (Eph. 1:4), in eternity.”<sup>83</sup> God chose His own unto salvation which is achieved in time through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. Only those who are elected by God have the Holy Spirit given to them by Christ. The Spirit of God sets them apart, regenerates their dead hearts and enables them to savingly embrace Jesus Christ. “Here, therefore, is the true port of safety, that God, who elected us from the beginning, will deliver us from all the evils that threaten us. For we are elected to salvation; we shall, therefore be safe from destruction. But as it is not for us to penetrate into God's secret counsel, to seek *there* assurance of our salvation, he specifies signs or tokens of election, which should suffice us for the assurance of it.”<sup>84</sup> If (as the Arminians teach) men elect themselves by an act of the unencumbered will (i.e. the divine decree is not based on God's good pleasure but sinful fallen man's choice of Jesus in history), then Paul's appeal to divine election as a reassuring

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<sup>82</sup> William Hendricksen, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954), 2:354-355.

<sup>83</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle's to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, [1937] 1964), 439.

<sup>84</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Second Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 439.

doctrine falls to the ground. Such appeals would really amount to no more than pep talks on man's own power. "Don't worry about your severe persecution. Your free will, which allowed God to save you, will pull you through this trial also." We must reject such humanistic nonsense and thank God for His election of us; for His sovereign decision to save us even though we deserved to go to hell for our sins and were completely unable to make any move toward God. Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father" (Jn. 6:65).

## Conclusion

The doctrine of unconditional election is foundational to biblical Christianity, for it places the salvation of men squarely in the hands of God. "Salvation is of the LORD" (Jon. 2:9). Men are saved *solely* by God's grace. Calvin writes, "We shall never be clearly persuaded, as we ought to be, that our salvation flows from the wellspring of God's free mercy until we come to know his eternal election, which illumines God's grace by this contrast; that he does not indiscriminately adopt all into the hope of salvation but gives to some what he denies to others. How much the ignorance of this principle detracts from God's glory, how much it takes away from true humility, is well known.... If—to make it clear that our salvation comes about solely from God's mere generosity—we must be called back to the course of election...."<sup>85</sup>

## Limited Atonement

A doctrinal issue which is crucial to our understanding of God's nature (i.e. His sovereignty) and the gospel is the extent of Christ's atoning death on the cross.<sup>86</sup> There are three different views current among professing Christians today: universalism, inconsistent universalism, and particularism. Universalists believe that Christ died for every individual (without exception) who ever lived. They believe that God intended to save every man by the death of Christ, and that since Christ died for everyone, everyone will (without exception) be saved. Although this view is logically consistent, it is *obviously unscriptural*. The Bible teaches that many people will go to hell (Mt. 7:13). Universalism is the dominant view among theological liberals, but since it is rare among evangelicals, our attention will be directed to the two remaining positions. Inconsistent universalism holds that Christ died for all men without exception, but that only *some* of those for whom Christ died actually will be saved. The rest will go to hell. This view is held by virtually all so-called fundamentalists and evangelicals today. Inconsistent universalists (i.e. Arminians) believe that Christ's meritorious work did not actually secure the salvation of any man, but merely made salvation a possibility for all men. Those who hold to particular atonement (i.e. Calvinists) teach that Christ died for the elect only. Christ's atoning death definitely secured the salvation of those for whom He died. The doctrine that

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<sup>85</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* III:XXI:1 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 2:921.

<sup>86</sup>"To this cardinal doctrine of the Word of God [God's sovereignty] Arminianism does great violence, for it teaches that God did no more than make salvation possible through the death of His Son, and that it is for the sinner to make his salvation actual by the acceptance of Christ in faith of his own free volition. Thus the realization of salvation is made to depend on the will of man, not the will of God. Man becomes his own savior. Salvation is no longer 'of God that showeth mercy,' but 'of him that willeth' (R. B. Kuiper, *For Whom Did Christ Die?* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959], 40).



Christ died only for some is very unpopular today; therefore, it is important to establish this doctrine from a careful examination of Scripture.

### Scriptural Particularism

Since many professing Christians have been taught that limited atonement is a dangerous error, one must carefully and objectively look at the scriptural evidence for such a doctrine. One must avoid going to Scripture with a set of preconceived notions that are *not* derived from the Bible itself. This brief study will show that the doctrine of limited atonement is expressly taught in Scripture. Furthermore, the doctrine of a limited atonement logically proceeds from the other well-established doctrines, such as God's absolute sovereignty, total depravity, regeneration, election, etc. After the scriptural evidence is set forth, the Arminian arguments against this doctrine will be examined.

**Matthew 1:21.** "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

There is great significance in the angels' expression "His people." Did Christ come to save every person? Did He come to save the Jews only? No, He came to save His people. "Jesus is not to save every man, but only his *own people*, for whose ransom he made a pact with the Father, in the covenant of redemption, for it is said, *he shall save his own people.*"<sup>87</sup> Jesus came to save only those (the elect) given to Him by the Father. "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.... This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day" (Jn. 6:37, 39).

Note that the passage does not say that Jesus came to make salvation a possibility for every individual, but that He actually will save His people. Jesus saves His people from their sins. He saves from the guilt and penalty of sin by His sacrificial death. He provides a perfect, sinless life through His righteousness to satisfy the covenant of works and the demands of the law. Furthermore, He saves from the pollution and dominion of sin by the Spirit of His grace. "[I]n the fullest and most glorious sense he will save his people from their sins."<sup>88</sup> The angels' glorious declaration regarding Jesus could *not* have been made if Christ did not actually secure any person's salvation but had merely opened the *possibility* of salvation. B. B. Warfield writes, "The Calvinist is he who holds with full consciousness that God the Lord, in his saving operations, deals not generally with mankind at large, but particularly with the individuals who are actually saved. Thus, and thus only, he contends, can either the supernaturalism of salvation which is the mark of Christianity at large and which ascribes all salvation to God, or the immediacy of the operations of saving grace which is the mark of evangelicalism and which ascribes salvation to the direct working of God upon the soul, come to its rights and have justice accorded to it. Particularism in the saving processes, he contends, is already given in the supernaturalism of salvation and in the immediacy of the operations of the divine grace; and the denial of particularism is constructively the denial of the immediacy of saving grace, that is of

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<sup>87</sup> David Dickson, *A Brief Exposition of Jesus Christ According to Matthew* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1647] 1981), 7.

<sup>88</sup> William Hendriksen, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 133.

evangelicalism, and of the supernaturalism of salvation, that is of Christianity itself. It is logically the total rejection of Christianity.”<sup>89</sup>

**John 10:11, 14-16, 26-29.** “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.... I am the good shepherd, and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. 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.... But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand.”

Here is a portion of Scripture from the lips of Jesus Christ Himself which explicitly teaches particular redemption. Jesus does *not* lay down His life for the goats, for those who on the day of judgment are cast into the lake of fire, but *only* for the sheep. “It is for *the sheep—only* for the *sheep*—that the good shepherd lays down his life. The design of the atonement is definitely restricted. Jesus dies for those who have been given to him by the Father, for the children of God, for true believers. This is the teaching of the Fourth Gospel throughout (3:16; 6:37, 39, 40, 44, 65; 10:11, 15, 29; 17:6, 9, 20, 21, 24). It is also the doctrine of the rest of Scripture. With his precious blood Christ purchased his church (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25-27); his people (Matt. 1:21); the elect (Rom. 8:32-35).”<sup>90</sup>

### Other Passages

If Jesus’ statement regarding bearing the sins of the sheep were contrary to all the other biblical teaching regarding the extent of the atonement, election, predestination, and so on, one could reasonably argue that perhaps this passage does not mean what it appears to mean. There are several passages, however, which teach that Christ died not for every individual, including those in hell, but only for His church. Writing to Roman Christians Paul says: “Jesus our Lord...was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification” (Rom. 4:25). To the Galatians Paul writes, “Our Lord Jesus Christ...gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age” (Gal. 1:4). Paul says that Christ became “a curse for *us*” (Gal. 3:13); and that He *actually* redeemed His people from the curse of the law (v. 13). The church—the bride of Christ—is the object of His love: “Christ...loved the church and gave Himself for it” (Eph. 5:25). If Christ died for every individual and God really intends to save everyone, Romans 8:31-33 cannot be true, for nothing created can separate *us*—that is, God’s own people—from His love: “If God be for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also freely give us all things?” How does Paul define *us* in Romans? As every person in the world? No, but only as the elect: “Who shall bring a charge against God’s *elect*?” (8:33).

When the apostle Paul exhorts the Ephesian elders regarding their responsibility toward God’s people, he says: “Shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Ac. 20:28). Christ purchased, redeemed, and rescued from destruction His people, His bride,

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<sup>89</sup> B. B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 87.

<sup>90</sup> William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954), 2:111.

His church. Thus the saints in heaven proclaim: “You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9). Note that Christ did not purchase all men from every nation, but only some out of each nation. Christ purchased the elect, the universal church, with His own blood. This incredible purchase price (the bloody death of Christ) is repeatedly used by Paul to goad Christians to a greater sanctification: “You were bought at a price” (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23). If Christ did *not* purchase all men, then He certainly did *not* die an atoning death for all men. “Furthermore, when it is said that Christ gave His life for His Church, or for His people, we find it impossible to believe that He gave Himself as much for reprobates as for those whom He intended to save. Mankind is divided into two classes and what is distinctly affirmed of one is impliedly denied of the other.”<sup>91</sup>

Christ came not to save each individual in the world, but to set apart for Himself a special people: “Jesus Christ...gave Himself for *us*, that He might redeem *us* from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works” (Tit. 2:14). This passage restricts salvation “to his people, his church, those who are redeemed from iniquity, who are purged, who are a choice and peculiar people, and are zealous of good works. For these Christ gave himself and no other.”<sup>92</sup> Peter, writing to the elect (1 Pet. 1:2), agrees with Paul: “Christ suffered for *us*...who Himself bore *our* sins in His own body on the tree” (1 Pet. 2:24). The writer of the epistle to Hebrews says that Christ “Himself purged *our* sins” (Heb. 1:13); that He “obtained eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:12). “For by one offering He has perfected forever *those* who are being sanctified” (Heb. 10:14). The inspired apostles never speak of a salvation made possible to all men, but of the actual salvation of some men—the elect. Christ sets apart a people and *removes* their punishment. As John says, “The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses *us* from all sin” (1 Jn. 1:7); “In this the love of God was manifested toward *us*, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that *we* might live through Him... He loved *us* and sent His Son to be the propitiation for *our* sins” (1 Jn. 4:9-10).

## Jesus Died for Many

At the last supper Jesus tells His disciples that His blood is poured out “for many”: “For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Mt. 26:28). Jesus did not die for all or for just a few, but for many—the elect. In Mark 10:45 Jesus says, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” “*Many*, distinguished from one and all, and here applied to true believers, or the elect of God, for whom Christ came to suffer.”<sup>93</sup> Jesus dies as a substitute for His people the many. “The sacrifice of the one is contrasted with those for whom it is made; in allusion to Isa. 53:11 f. In rabbinic literature, and even more strikingly at Qumran, ‘the many’ is a technical term for the elect community, the eschatological people of God.”<sup>94</sup> The apostle John understood Christ’s meaning when he wrote: “He laid down His life for *us*. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the *brethren* (1 Jn. 3:16). The author of the epistle to the Hebrews says that “Christ was offered to bear the sins of many” (9:28). “The ‘many’ here are the same as the ‘many

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<sup>91</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Phillipsburg, NJ, [1932] 1979), 157.

<sup>92</sup> Thomas Taylor, *Exposition of Titus* (Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, [1619] 1980), 363-364.

<sup>93</sup> J. A. Alexander, *Mark* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1858] 1960), 294.

<sup>94</sup> William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 384.

sons’—His ‘brethren’—those who should be ‘heirs of salvation,’ for everyone of whom, ‘by the grace of God, He tasted death.’”<sup>95</sup>

There are some who argue that “many” is simply synonymous with “all”; that Christ died for all or every individual. There is a passage where all and many are used in a parallel manner: “Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous” (Romans 5:18-19). Although Paul describes the benefits of Christ’s death to “all men,” the “all” refers only to those united to Christ in His death. As Adam is the covenant head of all who are sinners by imputation, Christ is the covenant head of all who are justified or made righteous. “The plain meaning is, all connected with Adam, and all connected with Christ.... If the *all* in the latter part of the verse is co-extensive with the *all* in the former, the passage of necessity teaches universal salvation; for it is impossible that *to be justified, constituted righteous*, can mean simply that justification is offered to all men. The *all* who are justified are saved. If therefore the *all* means, all men, the apostle teaches that all men are saved...but Paul himself, distinctly teach[es] that all men are not to be saved, as in 2 Thes. i. 9.”<sup>96</sup> Thus, not only does Paul teach that “all” refers *not* to the whole human race but *only* those united to Christ in His death, but he also teaches that Christ’s death actually guarantees or secures salvation for the elect. Paul rules out the idea that Christ’s death merely made salvation a possibility.

### **Christ’s Death Is Limited Not in Power but Extent**

The inconsistent universalist and particular redemptionist both limit Christ’s death in some manner. The Arminian limits the power of Christ’s death to save, while the Calvinist limits the design of it.<sup>97</sup> The Calvinist teaches that Christ’s death is of infinite value to God because Christ was the *divine*-human mediator. Christ’s death was sufficient to save every man, woman and child who ever lived. In fact, it was sufficient to save everyone on a thousand planets, if God so desired. What limits Christ’s death is that by God’s design and purpose Jesus died only for the elect, those chosen to be saved before the foundation of the world. His death is directed to and

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<sup>95</sup> John Brown, *Hebrews* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1862] 1983), 430.

<sup>96</sup> Charles Hodge, *Romans* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1835] 1989), 172. “And just as the relation to Adam means the imputation to us of his disobedience, so the relation to Christ means the imputation to us of his obedience. Justification means our involvement in the obedience of Christ in terms of the same principle by which we are involved in Adam’s sin. Nothing less is demanded by the analogy instituted in this verse. Again, the involvement in the obedience of Christ is not that of our personal voluntary obedience, nor that of our subjective holiness. This would violate the forensic character of the justification with which the apostle is dealing. But we must not tone down the formula ‘constituted righteous’ to any lower terms that the gracious judgment on God’s part whereby the obedience of Christ is reckoned to our account and therefore reckoned as ours with all the entail of consequence which righteousness carries with it” (John Murray, *Romans*, 206).

<sup>97</sup> Christ died on the cross after mankind had already been around for at least 4,000 years. Did Christ die on the cross for the millions of people who already had lived and died; who were already in hell with no possibility of exercising saving faith in Christ? Such a notion is quite absurd. Furthermore, the Arminian believes that God has a perfect foreknowledge of whatsoever comes to pass. If God knew who was going to believe in Christ beforehand and based election on such a foreseen faith, then why did Christ bother to die for people He knew would certainly reject Him and go to hell? The Arminian must either limit the design of the atonement in some manner or believe that God is unwise and incompetent in carrying out His plan of redemption.

actually saves particular persons; not an indefinite mass of people or a hypothetical humanity. Christ offered a definite atonement. It is personal. He knows His own by name (Jn. 10:14).

The Arminian believes that Christ's death guarantees the actual salvation of not even one person. The Arminian believes in a very limited atonement: an atonement that is weak and impotent to save. God is helpless and waits for the sinner to save himself by choosing Christ. The Father's plan to save humanity has been defeated, because almost all of mankind has gone to hell. Christ shed His blood and suffered horrible tortures in vain for those who throughout eternity scorn and reject Him. The Holy Spirit has been overpowered and successfully resisted by the vast majority of people throughout history. If Arminianism is true, then God's plan of redemption is a colossal failure. God simply could not get the job done. Can a view which presents Christ's death as a failure be true? Should we believe in a theological system which presents God as mere puppet of man, as incompetent in achieving His own purpose? Arminianism presents a false picture of God. It is man-centered, a deadly hybrid between biblical Protestantism and humanism.

## **The Nature of the Atonement**

The greatest theological problem for Arminians (or inconsistent universalists) is the doctrine of the atonement. If one is going to hold that Christ died for every person, and yet hold that millions of people are going to hell, then one must distort the biblical meaning of Christ's death. That is precisely what Arminians have done. They argue that Christ's death has opened the door to reconciliation with God, but has not actually achieved reconciliation. They believe that Christ's death has made salvation possible for all, but has guaranteed the actual salvation of none. Does the Bible teach that Christ simply removed some legal obstacles, making salvation a possibility? No, that is not what the Bible teaches at all.

### *1. An Actual Redemption*

When the Bible discusses Christ's work of redemption, it uses terms that can mean nothing less than the actual accomplishment of a people's comprehensive salvation. All the theological words derived from the biblical doctrine of the atonement are unmistakably clear. Christ suffered *vicariously*; that is, He died in the place of His people. Christ was the *substitute* for His people. He assumed all their legal responsibilities; He suffered their penalty and rendered a perfect obedience for them. Christ could not be a substitute or vicarious sacrifice in a hypothetical sense. He lived and died for a real, definite, actual group of people. Christ's death was *expiatory*; His death actually removes the guilt of sin. His sacrifice of Himself was *propitiatory*; that is, it actually removes God's judicial displeasure against the sinner. Christ not only eliminated the guilt, penalty, and wrath due sinners, but He also lived in perfect obedience, fulfilling all the requirements of God's law and the covenant of works. If Christ has rendered a perfect and complete satisfaction to God, it logically follows that those united to Him in His life, death and resurrection must be saved and cannot go to hell.

### *2. A Salvation Secured*

That is the reason why the Bible teaches that Christ actually secured the salvation of His people, the elect. "For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost" (Mt. 18:11; Lk.

19:10). In the same discourse Christ says, “Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish” (Mt. 18:14). “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). “Christ...gave Himself for our sins; that He might deliver us from this present evil age” (Gal. 1:4). Jesus was “born under the law to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:4-5). “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15). “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). “You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Mt. 1:21). “When Paul says that ‘Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it’ (Eph. 5:25), he is alluding to Christ’s sacrificial offering. But he also states the design: ‘that he might sanctify and cleanse it...that he might present it to himself a glorious church’ (vv. 26, 27). The love spoken of here, the reference of the sacrificial offering, and the design are all restricted to the church. The design will certainly be fulfilled, and so the love and the giving of Himself achieve their object in the glorifying of that to which they were directed. It is impossible to universalize the reference of the sacrifice of Christ alluded to here; it is severely limited to those who will finally be holy and without blemish.”<sup>98</sup>

### *3. An Accomplished Reconciliation*

The Scriptures do not teach that Christ made reconciliation with God possible, but that He accomplished reconciliation, justification, and peace with God. Christ “is our peace” (Eph. 2:14). He died “that He might reconcile them [Jews and Gentiles] both to God in one body through the cross” (Eph. 2:16), “which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph. 3:11). Paul says that Christ achieved reconciliation not for those who made the first move toward God, but for sinners, for enemies. “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.... For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Rom. 5:8, 10). “But to make salvation possible, to make possible purification, deliverance, reconciliation, is something very different indeed from actually saving, purifying, delivering or reconciling. No man has the right to empty the glorious terms in which the gospel is revealed of all their saving power.”<sup>99</sup>

### *4. A Real Ransom*

The Bible describes Christ’s death as a ransom or payment to God. Jesus came “to give His life a ransom for many” (Mt. 20:28; cf. Mk. 10:45; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; Heb. 9:12; Rev. 5:9, etc.). Jesus eliminated the penalty due from the guilt of sin by His blood. He “redeemed us from the curse of the law” (Gal. 3:13). By His death, Christ obtained the forgiveness of sins for His people (Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:18-19). There is no indication in Scripture that Christ only paid a partial ransom, or that God the Father has not accepted the ransom price. On the contrary, Paul says that Christ “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people” (Tit. 2:14). If Christ has paid the full ransom price, then those bought and paid for with Christ’s blood cannot go to hell. Such a thing would be a travesty of justice and would make God’s acceptance of Christ’s work a sham.

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<sup>98</sup> John Murray, *The Atonement* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, n.d.), 28-29.

<sup>99</sup> A. A. Hodge, *The Atonement*, 402.

The implications of Christ's ransom payment are obvious. Boettner writes, "If the suffering and death of Christ was a ransom for all men rather than for the elect only, then the merits of His work must be communicated to all alike and the penalty of eternal punishment cannot be justly inflicted on any. God would be unjust if He demanded this extreme penalty twice over, first from the substitute and then from the persons themselves."<sup>100</sup>

### 5. All Saving Graces Flow from the Atonement

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ accomplished an objective redemption for the elect. No one who takes the Bible seriously can question the legal, forensic, objective nature of the terms used within the theological orbit of Christ's atoning sacrifice (e.g., expiation, propitiation, reconciliation, justification, and redemption). But another crucial aspect of Christ's atonement that is ignored by Arminians is the biblical teaching that Christ by His death also guaranteed the application of His work to the elect subjectively. Christ purchased all the spiritual graces for His people. God "has blessed us with *every* spiritual blessing in the heavenly places *in Christ*" (Eph. 1:3). Christ's perfect redemption is the fountain out of which flows regeneration, faith, repentance, and sanctification.

Although faith, repentance and sanctification are spiritual graces in which man cooperates with the Holy Spirit, nevertheless they are described in Scripture as gifts from God. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the *gift* of God" (Eph. 2:8). "Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to *give* repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins" (Ac. 5:31). "When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God saying, 'Then God has also *granted* to the Gentiles repentance to life'" (Ac. 11:18). It is man who must believe, repent, and grow in holiness, yet man, being dead in trespasses and sins, has no natural power to do these things. But because of God's election of some and their union with Christ in His life, death, and resurrection, God enables those who are unable. Even the believer's sanctification is guaranteed by his union with Christ. Paul argues in Romans 6:1-14 that real Christians cannot continue living in sin, because they were united with Christ in His death and resurrection. This means that those who are never sanctified (i.e. unbelievers) were never united to Christ in His death and resurrection. In other words, Christ did not die for them. Morey writes, "When Christ lived, died, was buried, arose, ascended, and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, we are told that the ones for whom He did these things are to be viewed as being in such a life union with Him as their covenant head and representative that it is said that they lived, died, were buried, arose, ascended and sat down at the Father's side 'in Christ' (Rom. 6:1-11; Gal. 2:20; 6:14; Eph. 2:5-6). *To say that Christ died for all is to say that all died in Christ.* It means that unbelievers are to be told that they have been crucified with Christ, been buried with Christ, have been resurrected with Christ and have ascended and sat down with Christ. This position is so manifestly false that it should grieve the child of God even to consider it."<sup>101</sup>

### 6. God Regenerates Only the Elect

All the graces mentioned in which man must cooperate have their starting point in regeneration. Regeneration is an act of God the Holy Spirit upon the human heart, which enables

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<sup>100</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 155.

<sup>101</sup> Robert A. Morey, *Studies in the Atonement* (Southbridge, MA: Crown Pub., 1989), 64.

men who are dead spiritually to live, understand spiritual truth, and trust in Christ. Regeneration, or the new birth, is sovereignly bestowed by God. “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (Jn. 3:8). God is the author of regeneration. “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols...I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezek. 36:25-26). Regeneration is a gift of God. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Tit. 3:5). The foundation of a believer’s regeneration is not his faith, but union with Christ in His death and resurrection. “God...even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)” (Eph. 2:6). “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him (Col. 2:11-13).

If you are a Christian, it is because the Holy Spirit first renewed your heart and raised you up spiritually, enabling you to believe in Christ. Why did Lydia believe in the gospel preached by the apostle Paul? Because God first *opened her heart* and *enabled her to respond* to the gospel. Paul “sat down and spoke to the woman who met there. Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshipped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul” (Ac. 16:13-14). If regeneration is something that the Holy Spirit works directly upon the human heart, and is based upon a believer’s union with Christ in His death and resurrection, then one must conclude that God only regenerates the elect, and the rest He passes by.<sup>102</sup> If every person were united with Christ in His death and resurrection, then God would regenerate every person—but He does not.

The doctrine of a universal atonement has led out of logical necessity to a perversion of the biblical teaching regarding regeneration. Arminians argue that the new birth is God’s response to man’s faith in Christ. This assumes that man has the ability to believe apart from the regenerating power of God’s Spirit. “It infers that sinners are not really dead in sins or totally depraved. It implies synergism, i.e. salvation is accomplished by man and God, each doing his own part. It implies free-willism, i.e. Adam’s fall into sin and guilt did not bring man’s will into bondage to sin.”<sup>103</sup> The cart is placed before the horse, and God must share credit and glory with sinful man. “On the other hand, if regeneration precedes faith, this implies monergism, i.e. salvation is totally God’s work from beginning to end.”<sup>104</sup> As Jonah declared: “salvation is of the LORD” (Jon. 2:9).

### 7. *Christ Intercedes Only for the Elect*

In His priestly office Jesus Christ not only sacrificed Himself on the cross for the elect, but also continuously intercedes for them. “If anyone sins, we have an *Advocate* with the Father,

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<sup>102</sup> The apostle John says specifically that those who believe in Jesus were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man but of God” (1:13). Paul says, “It is not of him who wills...but of God who shows mercy” (Rom. 9:16).

<sup>103</sup> Robert A. Morey, *Studies in the Atonement* (Southbridge, MA: Crown Pub., 1989), 82.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*



Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 Jn. 2:1). “He continues forever [and] has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:24-25). Christ’s bloody death and His high priestly work go hand in hand. They cannot be separated. The common notion that Jesus died and is now passively waiting for people to accept Him is false. This means that if Christ died for every person in the world He must also intercede for every person in the world. It would be absurd for Christ to suffer and die an agonizing death to save someone and then *refuse* to pray for that person, yet in Jesus’ high priestly prayer He refused to pray for all men and prayed only for the elect. “As You have given Him authority over all flesh, then He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.... I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given me, for they are Yours.... Holy Father, keep through your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are.... I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one...and for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in me through their word.... Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved me before the foundation of the world” (Jn. 17:2, 9, 11, 15, 19, 20, 24).

If Jesus had indeed died for everyone in the world and was endeavoring to save all mankind, would He not then pray for everyone in the world to be saved? Yet He prays only for those chosen by the Father, those whom the Father gives to the Son. J. C. Ryle wrote, “This special intercession of the Lord Jesus is one grand secret of the believer’s safety. He is daily watched, and thought for, and provided for with unfailing care, by One whose eye never slumbers and never sleeps. Jesus is ‘able to save them to the uttermost who come unto God by Him, because He ever liveth to make intercession for them’ (Heb. vii. 25). They never perish, because He never ceases to pray for them, and His prayer must prevail. They stand and persevere to the end, not because of their own strength and goodness, but because Jesus intercedes for them. When Judas fell never to rise again, while Peter fell, but repented, and was restored, the reason of the difference lay under those words of Christ to Peter, ‘I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not’ (Luke xxii. 32).”<sup>105</sup>

One is left with only three possible choices. First, Christ prays for everyone and the Father refuses to answer Christ’s prayers. This option is unscriptural and impossible, for Christ doesn’t pray for all, and we are told that Christ’s intercession does save to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25). Second, Christ died for all but refuses to intercede for all. This would place a gross disharmony within Christ’s redemptive work. Third, Jesus died only for the elect, and thus prays only for the elect. This is the only option that is scriptural and makes any sense.

The apostle Paul clearly held to the third view. “Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies.... 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. 8:33-34). Owen writes, “That he died for *all* and intercedeth for *some* will scarcely be squared to this text, especially considering the foundation of all this, which is (verse 32) that love of God which moved him to give up Christ to death for us all; upon which the apostle infers a kind of impossibility in not giving us all good things in him; which how it can be reconciled with their opinion who affirm that he gave his Son for millions to whom he will give neither grace nor glory, I cannot see.”<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (England: James Clark, 1976), 3:205.

<sup>106</sup> John Owen, *Works* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1850-53] 1967), 10:182-183.

## The Arminian Dilemma

The Arminian view of Christ's atonement not only contradicts the biblical definition of Christ's redemptive work, but also contradicts itself. An examination of three options regarding Christ's death will prove that Arminianism is irrational. Jesus Christ paid the price and endured God's wrath against sin for either: 1) all the sins of all men, 2) all the sins of some men, or 3) some of the sins of all men. If number 3 is true, then all men still have the guilt of some sins to answer for. This would mean that all men will go to hell, for it only takes the guilt of one sin to merit eternal damnation. If one holds to option 2, that Christ died for all of the sins of some men, then one believes that only some men (i.e. God's elect) will be saved and go to heaven. This is simply biblical Christianity; that Christ actually achieved the salvation of all of God's elect. The non-elect are passed by and perish. Arminianism, or inconsistent universalism, holds to position number 1, that Christ died for all the sins of all men. If this position is true, then why are not all men freed from the punishment of all their sins. The Arminian will answer: "because they refused to believe in Jesus Christ. They are guilty of unbelief." But this unbelief, is it a sin or is it not a sin? If unbelief is not a sin, then why should anyone be punished for it? If unbelief is a sin, then Christ was punished for it in His death. If Christ paid for this sin as all others, then why must this sin stop anyone from entering heaven more than any of the other sins (e.g., murder, adultery, homosexuality, etc). Furthermore, if Christ did not die for the sin of unbelief, then one cannot say that He died for all the sins of all men. The Arminian cannot escape from the horns of this theological dilemma.<sup>107</sup>

## The Two Options

Given the fact that the Bible explicitly teaches that many people will go to hell, one is basically left with two options as to why; first, one can believe that God never really intended to save all men, that He of His own good pleasure decided to save only some. In other words, God is simply *unwilling* to save all men. The other option is that God really wants to save all men, but He does not have the power to do so. God is *unable* to save all men. The one who believes in a limited or definite atonement accepts the first option, because he believes it is in accord with all of the scriptural passages related to Christ's death. The one who believes in a universal atonement does have some apparent universalistic passages (dealt with below), but he is forced by his position to ignore or redefine several important doctrines: the nature of the atonement, union with Christ, Jesus' intercessory work, the new birth, and even God's sovereignty.

## Universalistic Presuppositions

The Bible teaches that God has ordained all things that come to pass, that He controls all events. God is absolutely sovereign. Yet the Bible also teaches that God is not the author of sin; that God doesn't do violence to, or coerce the wills of men; that men are definitely responsible for their actions as valid moral secondary agents. The Arminian system is a denial of the biblical doctrine of salvation and God's absolute sovereignty. In order to understand Arminian theology, one must examine their presuppositions. The whole system of universalism grows out of a few

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<sup>107</sup> This argument was taken from John Owen's treatise, "End of Christ's Death as Eternally Intended," in *Works*, 10:173-174 (paraphrased so as to be more understandable to the modern reader).

assumptions, *none* of which are based on the word of God. The first presupposition is that God had to voluntarily limit His own sovereign power in order for men to have a genuine free will. Arminians reason that if God has control over man's will, then man cannot be held responsible for His actions. A second presupposition is that God cannot command man to do something that he does not have the ability to carry out. Both of these assumptions are contrary to the clear teaching of God's word.

### **Does God Control the Human Heart?<sup>108</sup>**

1. The Bible teaches that God can accomplish whatever He desires. God is God. He cannot be thwarted by finite sinful man.

**Psalms 115:3.** "But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases."

**Psalms 135:6.** "Whatever the LORD pleases He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deep places."

**Isaiah 46:10-11.** "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure.... Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it."

**Job 42:2.** "You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You."

**Daniel 4:35.** "He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand."

2. Note also that God is sovereign even over man's heart and will.

**Proverbs 16:1.** "The preparations of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD."

**Proverbs 16:9.** "A man's heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps."

**Proverbs 19:21.** "There are many plans in a man's heart; nevertheless, the LORD'S counsel, that will stand."

If God controls man's steps, does this not prove that God is in total control? No matter what man plans, God's will is perfectly executed.

**Proverbs 21:1.** "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: He turns it wherever He wishes."

"What could be more explicit? Out of the heart are 'the issues of life' (Prov. 4:23), for as man 'thinketh *in his heart*, so is he' (Prov. 23:7). If then the heart is in the hand of the Lord, and if 'he

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<sup>108</sup> The biblical use of the word "heart" is different than today's English usage. In the Bible, "heart" represents every aspect of man's nature, including the intellect, will, and emotions. Repeatedly the Bible presents God working directly upon man's heart. Thus, God directly can influence man's will. God did not want Pharaoh to let Israel go, so He hardened Pharaoh's heart. This affected both his emotional state (he became angry and obstinate) and his will or decision (he refused to let Israel go).

turneth it whithersoever He will,' then is it not clear that men, yea, governors and rulers, and so *all men*, are completely beneath the governmental control of the Almighty!"<sup>109</sup>

3. God controls the human heart. He can harden it or He can open it to receive the gospel.

**Revelation 17:17.** "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."

**2 Thessalonians 2:11-12.** "For this reason God will send them [those who perish] strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned."

**Romans 9:18-21.** "He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. 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?' Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?"

**Deuteronomy 2:30.** "But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass through, for the LORD your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, that He might deliver him into your hand, as it is this day."

**Joshua 11:19-20.** "There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon. All the others they took in battle. For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that He might utterly destroy them, and that they might receive no mercy, but that He might destroy them, as the LORD had commanded Moses."

**Exodus 10:1, 20.** "Now the LORD said to Moses, 'Go in to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants, that I may show these signs of Mine before them....' But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go" (cf. Ex. 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 14:4; 20:27).

**John 12:39-40.** "Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they should see with their eyes and understand with their heart, lest they should turn, so that I should heal them" (cf. Mk. 4:11-12).

**Luke 24:4.** "And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures."

**Acts 16:14.** "Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the

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<sup>109</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1930] 1976), 43. "It would seem that if God put forth His power and exerted a direct influence upon men their freedom would be interfered with. It would appear that if God did anything more than warn and invite men, their responsibility would be infringed upon. We are told that God must not coerce man, still less compel him, or otherwise he would be reduced to a machine. This sounds very plausible; it appears to be good philosophy, and based upon sound reasoning; it has been almost universally accepted as an axiom in ethics; nevertheless, it is refuted by Scripture!" (Ibid., 145). "Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar" (Rom. 3:4).

city of Thyatira, who worshipped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.”

**Philippians 2:13.** “For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”

**Ezra 1:1, 5.** “The LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom.... Then the heads of the fathers’ houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, with all those whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the Lord” (cf. Ezra 6:22; 7:6; Ex. 12:36; Ezek. 36:27; Gen. 20:6; Isa. 6:9-10; Lk. 8:10).

The idea that God surrendered His sovereignty to man’s will is clearly unscriptural. There are so many passages in Scripture which show God working directly upon man’s heart and will to achieve His own ends that it is astonishing that anyone who believes in the authority of Scripture could deny it. Most evangelicals and fundamentalists, in their attempt to protect their unbiblical concept of free will, have dethroned God. God is helpless, waiting to see what finite, sinful mortals will do. The Most-High is stripped of His omnipotence. Pink writes, “The God of the twentieth century is a helpless, effeminate being who commands the respect of no really thoughtful man. The God of the popular mind is the creation of a maudlin sentimentality. The God of many a present-day pulpit is an object of pity rather than of awe-inspiring reverence. To say that God the Father has purposed the salvation of all mankind, that God the Son died and that God the Holy Spirit is now seeking to win the world to Christ; when as a matter of common observation, it is apparent that the great majority of our fellow-men are dying in sin, and passing into a hopeless eternity: is to say that God the Father is *disappointed*, that God the Son is *dissatisfied*, and that God the Holy Spirit is *defeated*.”<sup>110</sup>

The Arminian doctrine that God sovereignly decided to create an area of created reality (man’s will) outside of His control is irrational. It is a theological impossibility. Why? Because God by nature is absolutely sovereign and all powerful. He *cannot* create a pocket of chance or pure contingency in His creation. God would have to cease to be God and deny Himself to do so. God could no more cease control of man’s spirit than He could create a being that could exist apart from His sustaining power. God has created all things. He controls all things that come to pass by His power, and according to His plan. There is not one atom or one creature beyond His power and control. The very reason that God knows every bit of history in advance is not just that He knows all things and is outside of time, but also because everything comes to pass according to His decree. Nothing can occur without His ordering. “Should anything take place contrary to the will of God, because in the opinion of the finite creature it is not ‘good,’ then Satan and man (on occasion at least) must be equal or superior to the Creator whose Word claims that He is omnipotent and wholly irresistible! On the other hand, if the determinative will of Jehovah reflects His immutable nature of Being, it can neither be obstructed nor cancelled. Therefore, whatever comes to pass in any part of creation, at any time in history, does so because the omniscient God knew it as a possibility, willed it as a reality by His omnipotence, and established it in His divine plan or purpose.”<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Arthur Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, 20.

<sup>111</sup> Duane Edward Spencer, *Tulip: The Five Points of Calvinism in the Light of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 15-16.

The Bible teaches that when Christ returns, all His saints will receive glorified bodies and spend eternity in paradise with Him. All evangelicals believe this, yet the popular modern evangelical idea that God voluntarily limits His power so He doesn't intrude on man's free will would render this doctrine impossible. Why? Because if God has no power to control man's heart and will, there can never be a guarantee that someday down the road God's saints or the angels will not sin and rebel against Him. In fact, given the length of the saints' stay in heaven (i.e. forever and ever), another fall into sin would be inevitable. If the Arminian argues that God will change the saints' nature at the resurrection rendering Christians unable to sin in heaven, then he has conceded the whole argument. Why? Because if God is able to change man's heart or spirit to make it fit for the heavenly state, then He also has the power to change man's heart and will on earth.

### **Does God Command What Man Is Unable to Do?**

One of the common arguments against God's sovereign grace is that God would never command man to do something that he is unable to do. Thus, it is argued that all men must have the ability to believe and repent of their own power apart from God's regenerating grace. It is astounding that an argument so obviously unscriptural could be so common among churches that hold to biblical inerrancy.

The Bible unequivocally teaches that all men are sinners (Rom. 3:9); none are righteous (Rom. 3:10); none does good (Rom. 3:12); none seek after God (Rom. 3:11); all are corrupt (Ps. 14:3); none have the ability to repent (2 Pet. 2:13; Jer. 13:23; Rom. 8:6-8); all are dead spiritually (Eph. 2:1); and are deaf and blind to spiritual truth (Isa. 6:9-10; Mk. 4:12; Lk. 8:10). Nothing could be more clear than that the fall of Adam has rendered mankind spiritually unable to respond to the gospel, yet God commands "all men everywhere to repent" (Ac. 17:30), and believe in Jesus Christ. The same Jesus who went throughout Israel preaching the good news said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws Him" (Jn. 6:44).

God gave the ten commandments to Israel and demands a perfect and perpetual obedience to His moral law from all mankind in thought, word and deed. Yet the Scriptures make it abundantly clear that no one except Jesus Christ has kept, or can keep, God's law. "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3). Jesus commanded His disciples to be perfect (Mt. 5:48), yet the apostle John says that no Christian can achieve sinless perfection in this life (1 Jn. 1:8). Jesus often commanded people to do things that apart from God's miraculous power they were totally unable to accomplish. "The man with the withered hand was commanded to arise and walk; the sick man to arise, take up his bed and walk."<sup>112</sup> After Lazarus was in the tomb dead for four days and was a rotting corpse, Jesus commanded Him to come forth. The idea that God can only base His commands on what man can do is thoroughly unscriptural and humanistic to the core. Why should God lower His perfect standard of righteousness to cater to man's sinful infirmities? The fact that man has rendered himself spiritually unable because of sin does not for one moment absolve him of his responsibility to obey God's moral precepts, believe in Jesus Christ, or repent of his sins. Berkhof writes, "The *reductio ad absurdum* of the Arminian view is that the sinner can gain complete emancipation from righteous obligations by sinning. The more a man sins, the more he becomes a slave of sin, unable to do that which is good; and the deeper he sinks into this slavery

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<sup>112</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 214.

which robs him of his capacity for good, the less responsible he becomes. If man continues to sin long enough, he will in the end be absolved of all moral responsibility.”<sup>113</sup> Girardeau writes, “It is common to represent the Calvinist as holding that God chains the sinner to a stake, and then invites him to come to provisions which are placed beyond his reach. The Calvinist teaches no such doctrine. He contends that the sinner chains himself, and that he prefers his chains to the provisions of redemption which are tendered him. He forges his own chain and then hugs it. The true doctrine is that the bread and the water of life are offered to all. None, by nature, hunger for the bread; none thirst for the water. To some God pleases to impart the hunger and the thirst which impel them to come and partake. Others he leaves under the influence of a distaste for these provisions of salvation—a distaste not implanted by him, but engendered by their own voluntary sin.”<sup>114</sup>

### **How Then Is Man Responsible?**

All honest students of Scripture must acknowledge that the Bible teaches that God is absolutely sovereign over His creation, including the actions of mankind. God has predestined (or foreordained) whatsoever comes to pass (Eph. 1:5, 11; Rom. 9:13-22; 8:29-39). The Bible also teaches that men are valid secondary agents and are truly responsible for their actions (Ac. 2:23; 4:27, 28; Jn. 9:11; Rev. 20:12; Jas. 1:13). The reason that so many evangelicals have perverted and avoided many of these important biblical truths is their insistence on attempting to fit difficult theological concepts into a humanistic straightjacket. The humanistic definition of human freedom, in which nothing can have an outside influence upon man, would require *man* to be God. Only God, who is self-existent, uncreated, undetermined, etc, is truly free in the sense that humanists demand. Man, however, is a creature. No person chose his parents, culture, time of birth, genetic pattern, etc

The biblical view of human freedom means first that man is not a robot or unconscious machine, but is a rational being created in the image of God. Man has rational self-determination. He is not determined by materialistic or extrinsic physical causes. It also means that God exerts His sovereign influence over man without destroying man’s valid choice. God does not put a gun to man’s head to force him to choose a certain way, but so uses internal (emotions, desires, habits, etc) and external (upbringing, circumstances, etc) means upon him that he freely acts in accordance with God’s plan (i.e. His decree). When a person chooses to do something, he does not act against his own will but freely follows his own heart. “The comprehensive decree provides that each man shall be a free agent, possessing a certain character, surrounded by a certain environment, subject to certain external influences, internally moved by certain affections, desires, habits, etc, and that in view of all these he shall freely and rationally make a choice. That the choice will be one thing and not another, is certain; and God, who knows and controls the exact causes of each influence, knows what the choice will be, and in a real sense determines it.”<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), 218.

<sup>114</sup> John L. Girardeau., *Calvinism and Evangelical Arminianism*, 369.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 215. “The will is not determined by any law of necessity; it is not independent, indifferent, or self-determined, but is always determined by the preceding state of mind; so that a man is free so long as his volitions are the conscious expression of his mind; or so long as his activity is determined and controlled by his reason and feelings” (Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989], 2:288).

Modern evangelicals may find this doctrine difficult and abhorrent, but those who claim to accept the authority of Scripture cannot escape it. God decrees the acts of man, yet men are free and responsible for their actions. “There is not a single indication in Scripture that the inspired writers are conscious of a contradiction in connection with these matters. They never make an attempt to harmonize the two. This may well restrain us from assuming a contradiction here, even if we cannot reconcile both truths.”<sup>116</sup> When the apostle Paul mentions the obvious objection to God’s control over man’s will in Romans 9:20, he refuses to even debate the issue. He simply says: “But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God?”

## **Problem Texts**

In spite of the overwhelming evidence in the Bible for a limited atonement, universalists simply point to the passages in the New Testament which say that Christ died for “all men” or the “world” and say, “case closed.” These passages, on the surface, may appear to contradict a limited atonement, but when biblically understood are actually in complete harmony with it. It is not uncommon for important doctrines to have what are called problem texts. Anyone familiar with cults knows how they take passages out of context and import their own meaning into them. In order to avoid the same mistake, a few principles of biblical interpretation should be considered.

One important principle is that Scripture cannot contradict Scripture. Therefore, when two or more passages seem to contradict one another, the clearer passages must be used to interpret the less clear ones. Another important principle is that the meaning of a word should be derived from the biblical text and not modern culture. Several passages in which a word is used should be studied and compared in order to understand its meaning and usage when the gospel or epistle was written. If someone ignores how a word or phrase was used in first century Greek, Roman, or Hebrew society and instead imports a twentieth century American or European meaning, he often will totally misunderstand what the Bible says. This is precisely what Arminians have done with the words “all” and “world.” They have not closely checked the biblical usage, and thus have poured their own meaning into these words. A brief examination of these words in Scripture will prove that they do not teach that Christ died for every sinner who ever lived.

## **“All Men“**

Does the word “all” in Scripture mean all men without exception throughout the entire world? The word “all” almost never carries that sense. It is restricted by the biblical context. “And you [the apostles] will be hated by *all* for My name’s sake” (Mt. 10:22). The apostles obviously were not hated by every man, woman, and child throughout the world, but only by a majority of unbelievers whom they came in contact with throughout the Roman empire. “*All* counted John to have been a prophet indeed” (Mk. 11:32). This cannot mean all men or even all of the Jews, for many of the Pharisees did not regard John as a prophet. It simply means that most people among the Jews regarded John as a prophet. “My manner of life from my youth...*all* the Jews know” (Ac. 26:4). This cannot mean that all the Jews scattered throughout the world knew of Paul. Nor does it even mean that every Jew within Israel knew Paul personally. It simply means that many Jews knew Paul’s manner of life. “And they came to John and said to

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<sup>116</sup> L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 106.



him, ‘Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified—behold, He is baptizing, and *all* are coming to Him!’” (Jn. 3:26; cf. Mt. 3:5-6; Mk. 1:5). Not all in the world, or even all in Judea, but *many* in Israel came to Jesus. “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw *all* men to Myself” (Jn. 12:32, NASB). This cannot mean all men without exception, for it would mean that all men will be saved. “This *all men*, in the given context which places Greeks next to Jews, must mean *men from every nation*.”<sup>117</sup> The apostle Paul was told, “you will be a witness for him to *all men* of what you have seen and heard” (Ac. 22:15). Did Paul preach the gospel to the Chinese, the Eskimos, or the Indians in North and South America? Of course not! What is meant is that Paul would be preaching to the Jews and *the Gentiles*. Now that it has been established scripturally that *all* often does not mean every human being on earth throughout history, let us examine some of the universalistic proof texts that are based on the word *all*.

**2 Peter 3:9.** “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that *all* should come to repentance.” When Peter says that “God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance,” who is he referring to when he says all? The word all is clearly restricted by the context to the pronoun *us*. Peter is clearly referring to believers, to Christians when he says “us” (2 Pet. 1:1). God is not willing that any of *us* (that is, Christians) should perish, but that all of *us* (God’s people) should come to repentance. If Peter had meant that God is not willing that any person in the whole world will perish, then this passage would teach universal salvation, for the Bible teaches that God does have the power to carry out His will. “No one can take II Pet. 3:9 to support the Arminian position without wrestling it out of context, misapplying it to the reprobate, and breaking basic rules for the interpretation of plain English or Greek. Peter’s position there, as everywhere else, is that *Christ died for us* (the elect) and not for the whole world.”<sup>118</sup>

**2 Corinthians 5:14-15.** “For the love of Christ constrains us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” This passage says that Christ died for all. The question is: does all here refer to the whole human race or to the elect—the church? The analogy of Scripture and the context clearly favors the elect only. Paul’s aim in this passage is to motivate Christians to greater obedience by pointing to Christ’s love for us and the judicial union with Christ in His death and resurrection. If Paul was teaching that Christ died for all men without distinction, this passage would prove too much, for Paul’s argument is that this union with Christ in His death and resurrection (which according to the Bible definitely achieves expiation of sin and reconciliation with God) must lead to the service of Jesus Christ—“the love of Christ constrains us.” “Can it be said of all men, including those who reject the gospel or have never heard it, that they died when Christ died on the cross; can it be said of them that they no

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<sup>117</sup> William Hendriksen, *John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953) 2:203. “In Scripture the word ‘all’ (as applied to humankind) is used in two senses—absolutely and relatively. In some passages it means all without exception; in others it signifies all without distinction. As to which of these meanings it bears any particular passage, must be determined by the context and decided by a comparison of parallel Scriptures. That the word ‘all’ is used in a relative and restricted sense, and in such cases means all without distinction, is clear from a number of Scriptures” (Arthur Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, 68-69).

<sup>118</sup> Duane Edwards Spencer, *Tulip*, 40.

longer live unto themselves but unto Christ who died for them?”<sup>119</sup> Can it be said that they are a new creation; that the old pagan lifestyle has been replaced by a Christian lifestyle (v. 17). Can we refer to Adolf Hitler, Stalin, or Charles Manson as “the righteousness of God in Him” (v. 21). If the things that Paul attributes to those united to Christ in His death and resurrection cannot be attributed to all men, then in this passage Paul cannot be referring to all men, but to the elect only.

**1 Corinthians 15:22.** “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” The use of all in this passage refers to all in Adam and all in Christ. Adam is the covenant head of all those who die, and Christ is the covenant head of all those who shall live, or all those who will have eternal life. Since all men do not have eternal life, the “all” in Christ cannot refer to the whole human race without exception. The word all in the second half of the verse must be restricted to believers. This interpretation is strengthened by the parallel passage in Romans 5:12-21, where it is stated that those in Christ are justified. “No historical Christian church has ever held that all men indiscriminately are justified. For whom God justifies, them he also glorifies, Rom. 8:30.”<sup>120</sup> Consistent universalists understand that those in Christ who are justified in Him must go to heaven; therefore, this is a major proof text for their heretical notion that all men will go to heaven.

**2 Timothy 2:3-6.** “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 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.” Of the proof texts cited thus far for a universal atonement, this passage is considered to be the strongest in favor of their doctrine. However, before jumping to conclusions one should first examine the Greek text, the immediate context, and the theological context (or the analogy of Scripture). There are many reasons why this passage should not be construed to mean that Christ died for every individual who ever lived.

Note, first, that the context favors translating the Greek word all (*pas*) as *all kinds* of men. In 1 Timothy 2:1 Paul says “that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority.” Paul means that we are to pray for *all kinds* of people, or *all sorts* of people—including the civil authorities. Paul’s use of all in verse one *cannot* mean all men that have ever existed, or who exist presently, or who shall exist in the future. Are Christians supposed to pray for the millions of people who are dead and burning in hell? Furthermore, the myriads of people in heaven certainly are in no need of our prayers. In John chapter 17 Jesus refused to pray for all men: “I pray for them. I do not pray for the world” (v. 9). The apostle John says specifically that believers are not to pray for those who have committed the sin leading to death (cf. 1 Jn. 5:16). Paul also tells believers to give thanksgiving for all men. Are Christians supposed to give thanks for the persecuting Nero, Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Chairman Mao, Charles Manson, child molesters, etc? Of course not! Christians are to pray for all *types* of men: “that is, for men of the highest, as well as the lowest rank and quality.”<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> J. Gresham Machen, *God Transcendent and Other Sermons* (Grand Rapids, 1949), 134 ff., quoted in R. B. Kuiper, *For Whom Did Christ Die?* 30.

<sup>120</sup> Charles Hodge, *I and II Corinthians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1857] 1959), 325.

<sup>121</sup> John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth* (Streamwood, IL: Primitive Baptist Library, 1978 [1855]), 50.

But does the Greek language permit one to translate or interpret “all men” as “all kinds of men”? Yes; in fact, there are many instances in the New Testament in which *pas* is translated as “all kinds of” or “all manner of” (e.g., Mt. 4:23; 5:11; 10:1; Lk. 11:42; Ac. 10:12; Rom. 7:8; Rev. 21:19). Custance writes, “Every lexicon of New Testament Greek and of Classical Greek agrees upon the validity of the expanded translation. Thayer, for example, gives a number of references by way of illustration and adds this comment: ‘So especially with nouns designating virtues or vices, customs, characters, conditions, etc’ On numerous occasions it greatly illuminates the text to convert the simple ‘all’ (whether things or men) into ‘all kinds of’ or some such alternative.”<sup>122</sup> Therefore, if the context and many other clear doctrines and passages point in the direction of the expanded meaning of all (i.e. “all kinds of”), then one is justified in preferring such an interpretation.

Although the Greek language permits, and the immediate context favors, the view that Paul is speaking of *all kinds of men*, the greatest reason one should favor the interpretation above is that it best fits with the many clear passages which discuss Christ’s death and God’s will. The salvation spoken of in this passage is not a mere possibility of salvation, or an offer of salvation, or an arrangement set up by God in which men can save themselves. Paul is speaking of a real, certain and actual salvation. When Paul says that it is God’s will, or desire, that all men are to be saved, he is not speaking of a will conditioned by man’s response. Such would clearly contradict Scripture: “It is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy” (Rom. 9:16; cf. Jn. 1:13). God’s will regarding “the salvation of men is absolute and unconditional, and what infallibly secures and produces it”<sup>123</sup> (cf. Rom. 9:11; Eph. 1:4, 5, 11; 2:10). If it was God’s will that all men without exception should be saved, then all men would go to heaven. This passage would teach a universal salvation. Paul says, “Who has resisted His will” (Rom 9:19)? God’s word declares: “He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth” (Dan. 4:35).

Does the Bible teach that it is God’s desire to save all men? No, not at all. God did not choose or elect all men to eternal life. He only chose some; the rest are hardened (Rom. 9:18). These are vessels of wrath prepared for destruction (2 Th. 2:11-12; 1 Pet. 2:8-9; Pr. 16:4; 1 Th. 5:9). God is infinite in power, knowledge and wisdom. If God really was trying to save every individual throughout history, then why did He restrict His special revelation to a tiny nation in Palestine under the Old Covenant? Why did God forbid Paul, Timothy, and Silas to preach the gospel in Asia (Ac. 16:6)? Why does the Bible repeatedly say that God hides the truth from many people (Mt. 11:25; Isa. 6:9-10)? Why did Jesus Christ not pray and intercede for all men, but only for some (Jn. 17:9)? In Acts 9, Jesus Christ appears to Paul and turns a zealous persecutor of Christians into the greatest evangelist the world has ever known. Why doesn’t God raise up thousands of apostle Pauls to spread the gospel throughout the earth? God certainly has the power to do so. But He does not. Regeneration is a sovereign act of God, yet God refuses to regenerate all men. Faith and repentance are gifts of God, yet God only grants these gifts to some and not others. The Bible clearly teaches that God is not trying to save all men. What it does teach is that He will save some people out of every nation before Christ returns (Rev. 5:9).

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<sup>122</sup> Arthur C. Custance, *The Sovereignty of Grace*, 163.

<sup>123</sup> John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth*, 50.

## “The World“

Those who believe that Christ died for all men without exception use as proof texts passages which say that Christ is the “Savior of the world” (Jn. 4:42; 1 Jn. 4:14), or that say “God so loved the world” (Jn. 3:16). Before one assumes that the term “world” means every single human being in the world without exception, one should carefully examine how the word world (*kosmos*) is used in Scripture. The term “world” has a variety of meanings in the New Testament. The best way to determine the meaning in each passage is to examine the context and other passages that have a similar usage. A clear passage can shed light on a less clear passage.

There are at least eight different uses of the term “world” in the New Testament. 1. The word can refer to the entire created order—the universe. “God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth...” (Ac. 17:24). 2. It can refer to the earth itself. “Jesus...loved His own who were in the world” (Jn. 13:1; cf. Eph. 1:4). 3. “World” can mean the evil world system (cf. Jn. 12:31; 1 Jn. 5:19). 4. Sometimes *kosmos* refers to the whole human race (except Jesus Christ). After spending two and a half chapters proving that all men without exception are sinners, Paul says “all the world” is guilty before God (Rom. 3:19). 5. Sometimes world refers only to unbelievers. The devil is called the “deceiver of the whole world” (Rev. 12:9). John says that “the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 Jn. 5:19). Christians are not under Satan’s power. Revelation 13:13 says that “all the world...followed the beast,” yet Christians do not follow the beast or receive his mark (Rev. 14:9-10). When Jesus told His disciples: “the world hates you” (Jn. 15:18), He obviously was referring only to unbelievers. 6. The term world can also be used to describe the Roman Empire or what was considered the civilized world in the days of the apostles. “A decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered” (Lk. 2:1). When Paul wrote to the church at Rome and said, “your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world” (1:8), most of the earth had not heard the gospel and knew nothing about the Roman church (cf. Ac. 2:5; Col. 1:23; Ac. 19:27; Gen. 41:57). 7. “World” is also used as a synonym for the Gentiles. “Now if their [i.e. the Jews] fall is riches for the *world*, and their failure riches for the *Gentiles*, how much more their fullness?” (Rom. 11:12; cf. v. 15, 32). 8. Sometimes “world” is used as a general term referring to the human race throughout the world. “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:19). This passage means that God is propitious to men (i.e. the class of beings). This passage *cannot* mean that God has reconciled every single individual in the world to Himself, for it cannot be said of individuals who do not believe and go to hell that God has not imputed their trespasses to them. People without sin do not go to hell. God is exercising mercy toward mankind as a class by saving men out of every nation, tribe, and tongue (Rev. 5:9). Some commentators (e.g., Arthur W. Pink and John Gill) argue that “world” in this and other similar passages is synonymous with believers only or the elect.<sup>124</sup> Although this interpretation has merit and fits in with the analogy of Scripture, it is not necessary to refute the notion that Christ died for all men without exception. Passages such as 2 Corinthians 5:19 and John 3:16 contain within their own contexts phrases which render the universalist interpretation impossible. Since the word “world” can be used in so many different ways in Scripture, one should be very careful to

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<sup>124</sup> Pink writes, “Kosmos is [also] used of believers only: John 1:29; 3:16, 17; 6:33; 12:47; I Cor. 4:9; II Cor. 5:19. We leave our readers to turn to these passages, asking them to note, carefully, exactly what is said and predicated of ‘the world’ in each place” (*The Sovereignty of God*, 254).

study the context in each case before jumping to a conclusion which contradicts other plain teachings in Scripture. Here are a few examples.

### **John 4:42**

When the Bible says that Jesus Christ is “the Savior of the world,” it does not mean that He died for every individual in the world, but that He came to save people from every nation and not just Israel. This later interpretation is easily proven from the context. In John 4 Jesus witnesses to and converts a Samaritan woman. To modern believers this may hold little significance, but in Jesus’ day the Jews had nothing to do with the Samaritans (Jn. 4:9). After the woman witnesses to the Samaritans of her city and many believe, Jesus spends two whole days among the Samaritans and many more believe in Him (Jn. 4:39-41). The Samaritans say to the woman, “this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world” (4:42). The common idea in Jesus’ day among Jews was that the Messiah was coming to save only Israel, but to the Samaritans’ surprise and gratitude, they now understand that the Messiah will save people from every nation, even the despised Samaritans. To assert that the Samaritans were saying that Christ had come to offer a hypothetical salvation to every individual, or that every individual in the whole world would actually be saved is absurd.

### **1 John 2:2**

But what about 1 John 2:2: “He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for our sins only, but also for the whole world“? The apostle John was a Jew writing to Jewish believers.<sup>125</sup> John is saying that Christ is the propitiation not only for the sins of the Jews, but also for the whole world—the Gentiles also. This interpretation is preferable for a number of reasons. First, note the striking similarity between this passage and John 11:51, 52, “Jesus would die for the nation [Israel], and not for that nation [Israel] only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad [i.e. the elect in every nation—the world].” Caiaphas, under divine inspiration, contrasts Israel and the world. It was common for Jews in ancient rabbinic literature to use the terms “world” and “Gentiles” as synonymous. Note how the apostle Paul uses “world” and “Gentiles” in a parallel manner: “Now if their fall is riches for the *world*, and their failure riches for the *Gentiles*...” (Rom. 11:12).<sup>126</sup> Second, John uses the word “propitiation,” a word which means that God’s wrath against the sinner is appeased and removed. If John means that Christ is a propitiation for all men without exception, even for those people in hell, then this passage would teach a universal salvation. If one prefers to translate the Greek word as “expiation” instead of “propitiation,” the passage would still teach universalism. Expiation means that the guilt of sin is removed. If the guilt of sin is removed from

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<sup>125</sup> “In Gal. 2:9 we are told that John, together with James and Cephas, were apostles ‘unto the circumcision’ (i.e. Israel). In keeping with this, the Epistle of James is addressed to ‘the twelve tribes, which are scattered abroad’ (1:1). So, the first Epistle of Peter is addressed to ‘the elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion’ (I Pet. 1:1, R.V.). And John is also writing to saved Israelites, but for saved Jews and saved Gentiles” (Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, 258).

<sup>126</sup> “Beyond all doubt, Romans 11:32, ‘For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, in order that he might have mercy on all,’ must also be interpreted as referring to both Jews and gentiles rather than to all individuals constituting the human race. The entire context points unmistakably in that direction. Nothing could be clearer than that the reference of the twofold ‘all’ is exhausted by the two classes, Jews and gentiles, discussed in the immediate context” (R. B. Kuiper, *For Whom Did Christ Die?* 34).

everyone, then why would God punish anyone? Third, “If Christ is the propitiation for *everybody*, it would be idle tautology to say, first, ‘He is the propitiation for *our* sins and *also* for everybody.’ There could be no ‘also’ if He is the propitiation for the entire human family. Had the apostle meant to affirm that Christ *is* a universal propitiation, he had omitted the first clause of v. 2, and simply said, ‘He is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world.’”<sup>127</sup>

### John 3:16

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

This passage is often quoted by those who argue that Christ died for all men without exception. But the phrase “that whosoever believes” restrains the universal term “world.” It shows that Christ only died for those who believe in Him. Only believers have their sins removed and thus have eternal life. Furthermore, the reason that the Father sent His Son into the world was His love. The Bible, however, teaches that God does *not* love every individual in the world. “Did God love Pharaoh? (Rom. 9:17). Did He love the Amalekites? (Ex. 17:14). Did He love the Canaanites, whom He commanded to be exterminated without mercy? (Dt. 20:16). Did He love the Ammonites and Moabites whom He commanded not to be received into the congregation forever? (Dt. 23:3). Does He love the workers of iniquity? (Ps. 5:5). Does He love the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction, which He endures with much long-suffering? (Rom. 9:22). Did He love Esau? (Rom. 9:13).”<sup>128</sup> It is true that God bestows a type of general favor upon mankind that theologians call common grace. That is, all men enjoy the benefits of God’s creation for a season. It is also true that in a sense all mankind receives certain benefits from Christ’s death. The rise of western Christian culture has influenced the world, but these general benefits certainly do not explain the infinite love behind Christ’s death.

Because of the context and the manner in which “world” is used in other similar passages, it is unlikely that “world” in John 3:16 refers to mankind generally. “[T]he term indicates *fallen mankind in its international aspect*: men from every tribe and nation; not only Jews but also Gentiles.”<sup>129</sup> God did not love Israel alone, but every nation. This does not mean that God loves every individual in each nation. Poole writes, “It is proper enough to say, A man loved such a family to such a degree that he gave his estate to it, though he never intended such a thing to every child or branch of it.”<sup>130</sup>

### Other Objections

A common objection against a particular redemption is to quote passages in which men are invited to believe, and then infer that man must have a free will and that Christ died for all men without exception. There are many “whoever” passages: “whoever believes” (Jn. 3:16; 11:26; Rom. 9:33; 10:11; Ac. 10:43, etc); “whoever confesses” (Lk. 12:8); “whoever receives Me” (Mk. 9:37); “whoever will come after Me” (Mk. 8:34). Isaiah’s prophetic invitation is often quoted: “Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters” (55:1). The idea that the gospel is offered to all; therefore, God is trying to save all; or therefore, Christ died for all *is an*

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<sup>127</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, 260.

<sup>128</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 293.

<sup>129</sup> William Hendriksen, *John*, 140.

<sup>130</sup> Matthew Poole, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1685] 1963), 3:292.

*assumption.* The gospel is to be preached to “all nations” (Mt. 28:19) and “to every creature” (Mk. 16:15) because God has His elect in every nation (Rev. 5:9). No one knows who is elect and who isn’t; the gospel must be offered to all without exception. Jesus said, “Many are called but few are chosen” (Mt. 22:14). Christ encouraged Paul to preach the gospel in Corinth; “for I have many people in this city” (Ac. 18:10). It is true that whoever believes in Christ will be saved, but the Bible teaches that some believe and others do not believe because of the electing choice of the Father and the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. God makes those dead in sins and unable, alive and able (Eph. 2:1). The unwilling are made willing. “No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day” (Jn. 6:44).

Another passage quoted as a proof text against sovereign grace is Romans 10:17: “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Arminians quote this passage and say, “See, people hear the word and believe; God didn’t cause them to believe.” The Calvinist does not deny that God uses means to achieve His purpose. The Holy Spirit uses the word of God to convince and convict. “If God has ordained a man to be saved, he has also ordained that he shall hear the Gospel, and that he shall believe and repent.”<sup>131</sup> Paul says, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase” (1 Cor. 3:6-7). In order for people to become Christians, they must hear the gospel and believe. But only those who God regenerates *will* believe. *God* gives the increase.

A passage often quoted by Arminians is Matthew 23:37, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” Arminians say that this passage proves that Christ is trying to save all men without exception, but it is only their human wills that prevent Him. Such an interpretation ignores both the context and the text itself and thus must be rejected.

A common mistake is to assume that Christ is speaking only about one group of people—the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Note, however, that Christ is discussing two groups. One is designated Jerusalem; the other “your children” (or Jerusalem’s children). A careful reading of the whole chapter makes it very clear that by Jerusalem is meant the civil and ecclesiastical rulers of the city: “The scribes and the Pharisees [who] sit in Moses’ seat” (v. 2); that is, the Sanhedrin. Jesus calls the scribes and Pharisees hypocrites, hinderers of the truth, oppressors of the poor, blind fools, blind guides, full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness, and sons of those who murdered the prophets. Jesus does *not* say, “I wanted to gather you (the ecclesiastical guides and rulers of the people) but you were not willing”; he says, “I wanted to gather *your children* [your subjects]...but you were not willing.” That is, the leaders of Jerusalem did everything in their power to hinder the work of Christ and prevent the people from coming to Him. Their apostate leadership brought destruction upon the city. It would be contradictory for Christ to spend a whole chapter speaking judgment, indignation, and rejection upon the Jewish leaders and then say, “I want to protect and nurture you wicked hypocrites, oppressors, murderers, etc” Gill writes, “The ruler and governors...are manifestly distinguished from their *children*; it being usual to call such who were the heads of the people, either in a civil or ecclesiastical sense *fathers*, Acts 7:2, and 22:1., and such who were subjects and disciples, *children*, 19:44, Matt. 12:27, Isa. 8:16, 18. Besides, our Lord’s discourse, throughout the whole context, is directed to the Scribes and Pharisees, the ecclesiastical guides of the people.”<sup>132</sup> David

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<sup>131</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 254.

<sup>132</sup> John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth* (Streamwood, IL: Primitive Baptist Library, [1735] 1978), 28.

Dickson writes, “O Jerusalem, how oft was I about to convert thy children, so many as I had elected, by the offers of mercy which my servants made unto you, the visible Church their mother? And you would not, but opposed my work so far as you could, in slaying the prophets, and stoning them who were sent unto thee for the elect’s cause who were in the midst of you.”<sup>133</sup>

A passage that is often quoted as a proof text for a universal atonement is 2 Peter 2:1, “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, *even denying the Lord who brought them*, and bring on themselves swift destruction.” Arminians use this passage to argue that Christ died for people who reject Him and go to hell. In other words, Christ bought or purchased with His own blood not just those who believe, but also those who disbelieve. The Arminian interpretation of this passage is the result of sloppy exegesis of Scripture, and must be rejected for a number of reasons.

First, one needs to understand that Peter is *not* speaking about Christ in this passage, but God the Father. The word that Peter used for Lord (*despoten*) in this passage, when used of a person in the Godhead, is always used to describe God the Father, and is never used to describe Christ. For example, Jude 4 says, “The only Lord (*despoten*) God and our Lord (*kurion*) Jesus Christ.” Other instances are Luke 2:29, Acts 4:24, 2 Timothy 2:21, and Revelation 6:10. The Holy Spirit for some reason uses a different word to describe the Father’s lordship from that of Jesus Christ. This, of course, is not meant to detract in any way from Christ’s glory and power. Gill writes, “the word *despotes* is properly expressive only of that power which masters have over their servants; whereas the word *kurios*, which is used whenever Christ is called Lord, signifies that dominion and authority which princes have over their subjects.”<sup>134</sup>

The reason that it is significant that Peter is speaking about the Father rather than specifically about Christ is that the word “bought,” in this context, cannot refer to the blood of Christ. This makes sense in light of the fact that the Bible teaches that those redeemed by Christ cannot fall away and be forever lost (e.g., Jn. 10:29; Rom. 8:29-39; Eph. 1:11, 14). What this purchase refers to is a *temporal* deliverance. Peter is using an expression which hearkens back to Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. “Do you thus deal with the Lord, O foolish and unwise people? Is He not your Father, who bought you? Has He not made you and established you?” (Dt. 32:6). There can be no question that Peter had Israel’s deliverance and experience in the wilderness in mind (cf. 2 Pet. 2:12-13; Dt. 32:5). Note the comparison between the people’s corruption and their blemish. Gill writes, “Peter makes use of this phrase much in the same manner as Moses had done before him, to aggravate the ingratitude and impiety of these false teachers among the Jews; that they should deny, if not in words, at least in works, that mighty Jehovah, who had of old redeemed their fathers out of Egypt, with a stretched-out arm, and, in successive ages, had distinguished them with particular favours; being ungodly men, turning the grace, the doctrine of the grace of God into lasciviousness.”<sup>135</sup>

The history of Israel shows that many of the Israelites denied the Lord that bought them, and thus perished in the wilderness. But we know from subsequent revelation that the Israelites who perished in the wilderness were never truly saved in the spiritual sense, but only received a temporary physical deliverance. When the author of Hebrews describes the Israelites who perished in the wilderness he says, “They have not known My ways.... We see that they could not enter in because of *unbelief*” (Heb. 3:10, 19). Therefore, there is no reason (in 2 Pet. 2:1) to

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<sup>133</sup> David Dickson, *Matthew* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1647] 1987), 318.

<sup>134</sup> John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth*, 61.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*



conclude that Peter refers to people who had genuine saving faith in Christ and who were actually purchased with His blood. In fact, there is every reason to conclude that Peter is discussing people who never had true faith; who only received temporary outward benefits. As the apostle John says, “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us” (1 Jn. 2:19).

Another strong reason to reject the interpretation which says that Christ shed His blood for people who go to hell is that it would totally contradict Scripture. Scripture consistently affirms that Christ died for: “His people” (Mt. 1:21); His “sheep” (Jn. 10:11, 14-16); “the church” (Eph. 5:25); “the elect” (Rom. 8:31-33); “us”—that is, believers (Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet 2:24; Heb. 1:3; 9:12; 10:14; 1 Jn. 1:7; 4:9-10); “the brethren” (1 Jn. 3:16); the “many” (Mt. 26:28; Mk. 10:45; Heb. 9:28). The Bible emphatically declares that all those for whom Christ died will definitely be saved (Jn. 6:39; Mt. 1:21; 18:11; Lk. 19:10; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 1:4; 4:4-5). Furthermore, it is irrational to assert that Christ removed the guilt and penalty due for sin for a particular person who will also have to pay the penalty for his sins in hell. That would be a great injustice. If one lets Scripture interpret Scripture, then one must reject the Arminian interpretation of 2 Peter 2:1.<sup>136</sup>

## Conclusion

Those who teach that Christ died for all men without exception must ignore the clear testimony of Scripture. Furthermore, the objections commonly raised against a limited atonement reveal either a poor understanding of biblical interpretation or a desire to impose one’s own presuppositions upon Scripture, or both. To deny limited atonement is to distort and pervert the whole biblical message of salvation, for there is a great difference between a death that actually saves—that actually renders satisfaction—and a sacrifice that makes salvation possible, if spiritually dead sinners do their part. The Arminian (or semi-Pelagian) message denigrates the cross of Christ. It is the root of both Romanism and humanism.

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<sup>136</sup> Another acceptable interpretation of 2 Pet. 2:1 that does not contradict Scripture is that of Alexander Nisbet (1623-1669): “That they should deny the Lord that brought them; which is not to be understood as if either Christ had died for such men (for then they could not have perished, John 10:11, 28)... The meaning therefore is that they, being by profession and in their own and others’ esteem, redeemed ones, should vent errors as would in substance tend to the denial of the sovereignty and Lordship of Christ over His people, by labouring under a pretence of Christian liberty (as it is, v. 19) to loose believers from their subjection to Christ’s royal law.... Albeit only the elect are redeemed unto life; and none of them who are given to Christ of the Father can perish or finally deny Christ unto destruction, because Christ is engaged to keep them from perdition (John 6:39), yet reprobates who do profess themselves to be redeemed by Christ and are esteemed for such by the church, may be said to deny the Lord that brought them, in the terms of judicial process (when they say He has redeemed them, and in the mean time, in doctrine and deeds, do deny Him and betray Him), howsoever in the terms of historical narration, they were never redeemed nor written in the Book of Life” (*Exposition of 1 and 2 Peter* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, (1658) 1982], 245-246).

## Irresistible Grace

A doctrine crucial to understanding the biblical doctrine of salvation is efficacious grace. Efficacious grace means that men who are dead spiritually are regenerated and effectually called by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works immediately upon the soul infusing a new spiritual life into it, thus changing it in such a way that it is spiritually alive and oriented toward Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit enables and persuades men to embrace Jesus Christ savingly. The reason it is called efficacious grace is that this special grace produces the effect intended by God: the salvation of particular individuals. This special grace has been called irresistible, effectual, invincible, unconquerable, and certain. This doctrine logically proceeds from man's total depravity and inability, God's unchangeable decree of election, and Christ's definite atonement for the elect. The doctrine of efficacious grace is intimately related to the doctrines of regeneration and effectual calling. If a person understands the biblical teaching regarding these doctrines, he will understand efficacious grace.

### The Arminian Doctrine of Sufficient Grace

Efficacious grace is one of the pillars of biblical Christianity, for the only theological alternatives to it involve some type of human merit in salvation. Classical Arminianism teaches that all men are depraved as a result of Adam's sin and thus cannot believe in Christ and repent without God's help. They argue that Christ died for all men without exception and that by His death Christ provided sufficient grace to all men to believe and repent.<sup>137</sup> Men are required to cooperate with this sufficient grace. Men of their own power, their own free will, either cooperate with this grace or reject it. In the Arminian system, salvation is based on the free will of man. Arminianism does not permit God to be sovereign over the salvation of sinners because that would intrude upon their concept of the sovereignty of the will of man. Man "is powerful enough to obstruct or resist the [special] grace of God who desperately wants all men to be saved!"<sup>138</sup>

It is important to recognize that the Arminian idea of a sufficient grace given to all men without exception is not taught anywhere in Scripture, but rather logically flows from their concept of conditional election and a universal atonement. If God is doing everything within His power to save all men, and if Christ died a sacrificial death for all men, then it is argued that the Holy Spirit must also work equally upon all men to save them. What makes the difference as to who is saved and who is not is the cooperation of the human will. Each person has the ability to reject God's special grace or to act upon it and be saved.

The problems that arise from the Arminian concept of sufficient grace are manifold. First, it cannot be reconciled with the total depravity and total inability of unregenerate man. The Bible

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<sup>137</sup> Arminians hold that the "influence of the Spirit which is exerted on the minds of all men is called 'sufficient grace.' By the two former [Romanists and semi-Pelagians] it is held to be sufficient to enable the sinner to do that which will either merit or secure larger degrees of grace which, if duly improved, will issue in salvation. The Arminians admit that the fall of our race has rendered all men utterly unable of themselves, to do anything truly acceptable in the sight of God. But they hold that this inability, arising out of the present state of human nature, is removed by the influence of the Spirit given to all. This is called 'gracious ability;' that is, an ability due to the grace, or the supernatural influence of the Spirit granted to all men" (Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1989], 2:675).

<sup>138</sup> Duane Edward Spencer, *Tulip: The Five Point of Calvinism in the Light of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 44.

teaches that man is either spiritually dead or spiritually alive. Sufficient grace cannot be made efficient by an act of the will if the will is spiritually dead and unwilling. For grace to be sufficient toward a spiritual corpse, it must also be efficacious. “A living man may be persuaded not to commit suicide; but a dead man cannot be persuaded into life.”<sup>139</sup> The Bible teaches that only regeneration can enable a person to repent and believe. Second, the Arminian concept of a resistible special grace necessitates radically altering the doctrine of Christ’s atonement. The Arminian is forced to argue that no causal and meritorious relationship exists between Christ’s redemptive work and the application of His sacrifice to those for whom He died. He must deny that Christ, by His suffering and death, procured regeneration and “merited faith and repentance for those who come at length to believe and repent.”<sup>140</sup> (As noted in the chapter on limited atonement, Arminians severely limit the power of Christ’s death to save.) Third, the Arminian idea that man must cooperate with grace in order to be saved has led to a complete redefinition of the doctrine of regeneration. If the Bible teaches that regeneration is solely an act of God in which man does not cooperate, then the idea that man allows God to regenerate people by an act of the will must be rejected. To argue that the first stage of regeneration is a work caused by man or partly by man and partly by God is a dangerous heresy. It is an explicit denial of the “necessity of an internal work of supernatural grace to conversion and the production of faith.”<sup>141</sup> It is *man* who must repent and believe in Christ. But if repentance and faith are not gifts of God produced by the Holy Spirit’s power, then faith becomes a work and not a product of pure grace. “According to the Arminian system it depends upon the free-will of the man to make the sufficient grace of God common to all men efficient in his case. But the Scriptures declare that salvation is altogether of grace, and a gift of God.—Eph. ii. 8; 2 Tim. ii. 25; Rom. ix. 15, 16.”<sup>142</sup>

Fourth, the Arminian idea that sufficient grace is given to all men is absurd given the fact that very few people throughout the world have had any opportunity to hear the gospel. In fact, in the past two thousand years only a tiny fraction of the world’s population has heard the gospel. If God is trying to save every human being, and has given sufficient grace to everyone, why would He not make provisions for all men without exception to hear the external call of the gospel? God could raise up one hundred thousand apostle Pauls if He wanted to. But He has not. Arminians, in their attempt to fit God’s plan of salvation into their concept of fairness, have presented God as an incompetent. God makes provisions in one area but forgets about another area. A humanistic, non-scriptural standard of fairness always leads logically down the road toward universalism. Both the Romish church and some prominent Evangelicals (e.g., Billy Graham) have already abandoned the scriptural doctrine that Jesus Christ is the only way to obtain eternal life.

Fifth, the Arminian position contradicts the express teaching of Scripture, which says “that not even all who receive the external call have sufficient grace.”<sup>143</sup> When Paul explained why most of ethnic Israel rejected the gospel he said, “Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were hardened. Just as it is written: ‘God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day’” (Rom. 11:7-8). Did God give the Israelites who rejected Jesus Christ sufficient grace to believe? Absolutely not! Rather than counteracting their depravity, inability and hatred of Jesus,

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<sup>139</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 2:684.

<sup>140</sup> William Cunningham, *Historical Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1862] 1960), 2:320.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:379.

<sup>142</sup> A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, [1860] 1973), 453.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 453.

God *hardened* them (v. 7, cf. Rom. 9:16-24; Jn. 10:26-27; Isa. 6:9-10; Mk. 4:12; Lk. 8:10). Jesus did *not* teach a sufficient grace to all, but an efficient grace to some. “Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of you father the devil.... He who is of God hears God’s words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God” (Jn. 8:43-44, 47). When Paul discusses the heathen in Romans 1:18-20 and 2:12-15 he says that they are responsible because of the general revelation in nature. He declares that they are under a law of works, yet says nothing about a universal sufficient grace.<sup>144</sup> Girardeau points out the absurdity and impossibility of the Arminian doctrine of sufficient grace:

The Evangelical Arminian not only admits the fact, but contends for it, that every man in his natural fallen condition is spiritually dead—is dead in trespasses and sins. The problem for him to solve is, How can this spiritually dead man make his possible salvation an actual salvation? It must not be done by the impartation to him of efficacious and determining grace, for to admit that would be to give up the doctrine of a possible salvation and accept that of a decreed and certain salvation. Nor must it be done by regenerating grace, for two difficulties oppose that supposition: first, this regenerating grace would necessarily be efficacious and determining grace; and secondly, it could not with truth be maintained that every man is regenerated. A degree of grace, therefore, which is short of regenerating grace, must be conferred upon every man. What is that? Sufficient grace—that is to say, a degree of grace imparting ability sufficient to enable every man to make a possible salvation actually his own. Now, the argument is short: a degree of grace which does not regenerate, would be a degree of grace which does not bestow life upon, the spiritually dead sinner. If it did infuse spiritual life it would of course be regenerating grace; but it is denied to be regenerating grace. No other grace would be sufficient for the dead sinner but regenerating or life giving grace. How could grace enable the dead sinner to perform living functions—to repent, to believe in Christ, to embrace salvation—without first giving him life? In a word, sufficient grace which is not regenerating grace is a palpable impossibility. An ability sufficient to enable the dead sinner to discharge living functions but not sufficient to make him live, is an impossibility. The Arminian is therefore shut up to a choice between two alternatives: either, he must confess sufficient grace to be regenerating grace, and then he abandons his doctrine; or, he must maintain that grace is sufficient for a dead sinner which does not make him live, and then he asserts an impossibility.<sup>145</sup>

### **The Necessity of Efficacious Grace**

The Calvinistic doctrine of efficacious grace can be understood only if one has a correct understanding of total depravity and the doctrine of regeneration. As noted in the chapter on total depravity, man is *not* in a state in which he can cooperate with the Holy Spirit. Man is dead spiritually (Eph. 2:1-5). He hates the truth and Jesus Christ (Jn. 3:19-21), dwells in darkness (Jn. 1:4-5), has an uncircumcised heart of stone (Ezek. 11:19), is helpless (Ezek. 16:4-6), cannot repent (Jer. 13:23), is a slave to Satan (Ac. 26:17-18), and cannot see or comprehend divine truth (1 Cor. 2:14). Can a spiritual corpse cooperate with grace? Can a person who is blind and deaf to

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<sup>144</sup> The Arminian concept of sufficient grace is also inconsistent with the doctrine of unconditional election. The Arminian doctrine of sufficient grace presupposes that God is trying to save every human being without exception and that the deciding factor is man’s free will. The Bible, however, teaches that God is only interested in saving the elect; the rest are passed by and justly cast into hell for their sins. If election is based upon God’s choice and not man’s choice (as Paul so clearly teaches in Eph. 1:3-6 and Rom. 9:11-23), then it would be at cross purposes for God to give sufficient grace to those who were not elect.

<sup>145</sup> Girardeau, *Calvinism and Evangelical Arminianism*, 316-317.

spiritual truth embrace it? Can someone who hates Jesus Christ because he is born at enmity with God change his own nature? Can a person of his own free will hate that which he naturally loves and love that which he naturally hates? “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil” (Jer. 13:23). Because man is spiritually dead, only a radical, all-pervasive change in man’s heart can enable him to embrace Jesus Christ. In order for God’s grace to be sufficient for any man, it must be efficacious. Only the power of God working directly upon the human soul can infuse it with new life. Sinful man does not need some assistance to save himself, but a spiritual resurrection, a total work of renovation. “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.... No one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father” (Jn. 6:44, 65).

### **Avoiding a Common Misunderstanding**

If men are dead spiritually, then only those whom God sovereignly chooses to regenerate will repent and trust Christ. The idea that men cooperate with God in regeneration is as absurd as teaching that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead because his corpse was willing to be raised. Some misunderstanding regarding regeneration is understandable given the fact that regeneration has two different senses in the New Testament. Sometimes it refers to the whole conversion process in which the reborn heart comes in contact with the word and is first called into action. Passages such as 1 Peter 1:23 and James 1:18 discuss the regenerate heart as it comes in contact with the Word of God and issues forth into conversion. “This is the effectual calling through the instrumentality of the word of preaching, effectively applied by the Spirit of God. This effectual calling finally secures, through the truth as a means, the first holy exercises of the new disposition that is born to the soul. The new life begins to manifest itself, the implanted life issues in the new birth.”<sup>146</sup> Arminians often quote passages which discuss the second stage of regeneration in which God employs means (the preaching of the gospel) to argue that the Holy Spirit uses moral suasion upon man’s will to get him to cooperate with grace and choose Christ.

This interpretation, however, ignores the other sense in which regeneration is used in the Bible. During the first stage in regeneration the Holy Spirit works *without means*; that is, He works directly upon the soul apart from the preaching of the Word. The Holy Spirit comes to a man who is dead, blind, and deaf to spiritual truth and quickens him, implanting new life into the dead heart. The inner disposition of the soul is renewed and made holy. “In this act of God the ear is implanted that enables man to hear the call of God to the salvation of his soul. *This is regeneration in the most restricted sense of the word.* In it man is entirely passive.”<sup>147</sup> The first stage of regeneration can be compared to the implantation of a seed, and the second stage could be compared to the process of giving birth. Regeneration in the strict sense logically precedes or is coterminous with the preaching of the gospel because the gospel cannot have persuasive power over a corpse. “Men see by the light. Without light vision is impossible. Yet the eyes of the blind are not opened by means of the light. In like manner all the states and acts of consciousness preceding or attending, or following regeneration, are by the truth; but regeneration itself, or the

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<sup>146</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), 471. It is obvious right in 1 Pet. 1:23 that Peter rejects the concept of decisional regeneration. There are two elements spoken of: the incorruptible seed which is implanted in the soul by the Holy Spirit, and the word of God which is the instrumental means for the second stage of regeneration: conversion. “Those who believe in His name...were born [aorist passive indicative], not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (Jn. 1:12-13).

<sup>147</sup> Ibid. (emphasis added).

imparting spiritual life, is by the immediate agency of the Spirit.”<sup>148</sup> Once God opens the heart through regeneration, the regenerated person can and will believe the gospel. “The Lord opened her [Lydia’s] heart to heed the things spoken of by Paul” (Ac. 16:14).

### **Regeneration Is Solely an Act of God**

The first stage of regeneration is *solely* an act of God in which man does *not* cooperate. Jesus said, “The wind blows where *it wishes*, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (Jn. 3:8). “When we examine the words of our Lord in John 3, there can be doubt but that He taught that God the Holy Spirit is the ultimate origin, source and author of regeneration. To Him belongs the glory and power forevermore. In regeneration, we must view God as being active while sinners must be viewed as totally passive. Thus regeneration is not a cooperative program between God and man. God *alone* regenerates, and He does so without the work, help or even consent of sinners.”<sup>149</sup>

That regeneration in the strict sense of the term is not a cooperative process between man and God is clearly taught throughout Scripture. Paul wrote, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and *renewing* of the Holy Spirit” (Tit. 3:5). God sprinkles clean water upon the human heart, cleansing it (Ezek. 36:25). The Holy Spirit removes the heart of stone that cannot respond to spiritual truth and replaces it with a heart of flesh (Ezek. 36:25). Jesus described the new birth as being “born of the Spirit” (Jn. 3:5-6). The terms used to describe the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart of man all describe a miracle of God. They all point to a spiritual resurrection. Men are “born again” (Jn 3:3), “regenerated” (Tit. 3:5), “made alive” or “quicken” (Eph. 2:5). The person regenerated is called a “new creation” (Gal. 6:15; 2 Cor. 5:17) and a “new man” (Eph. 4:24). “These terms denote a work of omnipotent power. The origination of life is impossible to the creature. He can receive life; he can nurture life; and he can use and exert life. But he cannot create life.”<sup>150</sup>

Men can preach effectively and use all the persuasive power that they can muster to convince people to believe in Christ. But only the Holy Spirit can enable a person to believe. Only God’s regenerating power causes the church to grow. Paul wrote, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase” (1 Cor. 3:6-7). “As in nature, planting and watering are not the efficient causes of vegetation; so in the church, ministerial acts are not the efficient causes of grace. In both cases all the efficiency is of God.”<sup>151</sup>

In John 3:3, where Jesus tells Nicodemus that “unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,” the word translated “again” (*anōthen*) should be translated *from above*.

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<sup>148</sup> Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:685. Rom. 10:17 speaks of the necessity of first hearing the gospel for people to have faith in Christ. Paul is saying that saving faith requires that people have certain knowledge of the truth; that is, they must know who Christ is and what He has done. In order for a man to have faith, he must have an object to have faith in. As a seed that is planted needs water to grow, the regenerate heart needs the word of God in order to exercise faith toward Jesus Christ. Faith is impossible without an object of faith. Regeneration in the first stage always (except in the case of elect infants) issues forth into conversion. The implantation of the incorruptible seed and the hearing of the gospel both are necessary for salvation

<sup>149</sup> Robert A. Morey, *Studies in the Atonement* (Southbridge, MA: Crown Pub., 1989), 119.

<sup>150</sup> William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1989), 2:495.

<sup>151</sup> Charles Hodge, *I and II Corinthians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1857, 59] 1978), 52.

Although the Greek word can be translated “again” (*palin anothēn*, Gal. 4:9) every other passage that uses this word in John (3:31; 19:11, 23) is translated *from above*. This is also the preferred meaning in the synoptic gospels (e.g., Mk. 15:38). “It is a second birth to be sure, regeneration, but a birth from above by the Spirit.”<sup>152</sup> Regeneration comes from heaven, that is, from God. The book of James uses this word in the same manner: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is *from above*, and comes down from the Father of lights” (Jas. 1:17; cf. 3:15).

The apostle John explicitly taught that man has nothing to do with his own or anyone else’s regeneration. “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). John said that the new birth is “not of blood,” that is, it has nothing to do with one’s blood line, heredity or race. This view was the common error of the Jews. He also said: “nor of the will of the flesh.” “That which is born of the flesh is flesh” (Jn. 3:6). The natural or fleshly man can only act according to his depraved, corrupt nature. He is blind to spiritual truth, hates God and is opposed to divine truth. The fleshly man cannot initiate the first move toward God unless God first changes his heart. This phrase drives a stake through all synergistic views of regeneration. He continued: “nor of the will of man.” The new birth is not brought into existence by the persuasive power of friends; the great technique of the preacher or the soft mood of the organ music. The new birth is solely a divine work. The Greek says: “but of God were born.” The *but* is emphatic, emphasizing the contrast between all forms of human effort with the regenerating power of God.

Paul said that “no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3). Luke declared that “as many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (Ac. 13:48). The apostle John wrote, “But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things” (I Jn. 1:20). Why is one person saved and another left in darkness? Because one is regenerated by the Spirit and another is passed by. “For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did receive it, why do you glory as if you had not received it?” (1 Cor. 4:7). “Man needs for God to draw him irresistibly by His grace, or man will never make so much as a single step in the direction of Christ.”<sup>153</sup> This is the express teaching of Christ: “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (Jn. 6:44).

When Jesus Christ declared to Nicodemus, “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (Jn. 3:6), He was telling Nicodemus that the Holy Spirit was the author of regeneration and that the regenerated person *has become a spiritual person*. “The spiritual man has a spiritual mind, he is possessed with a Person who indwells, seals, intercedes, and empowers.”<sup>154</sup> The person who is regenerated has spiritual reality opened up to him. When he reads or hears biblical truth he knows that it is true and immediately believes in Jesus Christ. The regenerating power of the Holy Spirit enables the sinner to see, hear and live; therefore, after regeneration the sinner can repent and turn to Christ. Conversion is the fruit, not the cause, of regeneration. “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, *that we might know* the things that have been freely given to us by God” (1 Cor. 2:12). Without this spiritual renewal, which is purely a gift of God dependent upon nothing that we do, no one would turn to Christ. “For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts *to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God* in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).

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<sup>152</sup> A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1932]), 5:45.

<sup>153</sup> Duane Edward Spencer, *Tulip: The Five Points of Calvinism in the Light of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 49.

<sup>154</sup> John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 100.

If you are a Christian, it is because God renewed your heart, *enabling* you to believe in Jesus Christ. Why did Lydia believe in the gospel preached by the apostle Paul? Because God first *opened her heart* and *enabled her to respond* to the gospel. Paul “sat down and spoke to the women who met there. Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshipped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken of by Paul” (Ac. 16:13-14). Those who pervert the biblical doctrine of regeneration are guilty of serious error. Because *God alone* deserves the credit and the glory for man’s salvation, “Salvation is of the Lord” (Jon. 2:9).

Because men are dead in trespasses and sins and unable to comprehend divine truth (1 Cor. 2:14), the Holy Spirit must do a recreative work upon man’s heart in order for him to comprehend and believe the gospel. Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see [comprehend, perceive] the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:3). “Christ places regeneration by the Spirit as a requirement before one can “see,” i.e. believe, or have faith in the Kingdom of God. He states quite emphatically that a sinner who is born of the flesh cannot believe the good news of the kingdom until he is born by the Spirit. Thus, according to the teaching of Christ, we believe *because* we are “born again.” We are not “born again” because we believe!”<sup>155</sup>

Why do most evangelicals and fundamentalists, who have such a high view of Scripture, err so badly on such an important aspect of Christian doctrine? The answer lies in their idea that not even God can do anything to directly change the human will. Although it is true that their doctrine of the new birth flows from their defective understanding of the fall and Christ’s redemptive work, the foundational reason for their error is their exaltation of the human will above even God’s will. They regard the Calvinistic view that God works directly upon the human heart, changing it in a God-ward direction, to be a coercive violation of man’s free will. The Arminian recognizes that once he accepts the idea that God has the power to work directly upon the human heart so that a person will definitely embrace Jesus Christ, his whole paradigm of the salvation process is at once disproved and overthrown. Why? Because this would mean that it is God and not man who determines who is and who is not saved; that God is not trying to save all men, for He obviously does not regenerate all men. “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven” (Jn. 3:27). “Only those views which ascribe to God *all* the power in the salvation of sinners are consistently evangelical, for the word ‘evangelical’ means that it is God alone who saves. If faith and obedience must be added, depending upon the independent choice of man, we no longer have evangelicalism.”<sup>156</sup>

## **God Changes the Heart**

Are the Arminians correct when they argue that God cannot directly change the human heart, or that God must first get permission from sinful man to change him? The Arminian position is totally contrary to the explicit teaching of Scripture. There are many passages which teach that God is sovereign over man’s heart and will (cf. Pr. 16:1, 9, 21; Ex. 10:1, 20; Dt. 2:30; Josh. 11:19, 20; Jer. 32:40; Ezek. 1:1, 5; Lk. 24:45; Jn. 12:39, 40; Ac. 16:14; Rom. 9:18-21; Phil. 2:13; 2 Th. 2:11, 12; Rev. 17:17). Also, the descriptions of the new birth given in the Bible are descriptions of God directly changing the human heart. “And the Lord you God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord you God with all your heart and

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<sup>155</sup> Robert A. Morey, *Studies in the Atonement*, 82.

<sup>156</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 173-174.



with all your soul, that you may live” (Dt. 30:16). “Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them” (Ezek. 11:19-20). “I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Jer. 31:33). “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes” (Ezek. 36:26-27). God quickens or renews the human heart. “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything but a *new creation*” (Gal. 6:15). “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the *washing* of regeneration and *renewing* of the Holy Spirit” (Tit. 3:5). The Holy Spirit circumcises the heart. “And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses” (Col. 2:13). “In Him you were circumcised with the circumcision made without hands” (Col. 2:11).

Regeneration is an act of God upon man’s heart. “The Holy Spirit comes and does something to the soul of man.... He penetrates into the innermost recesses of man, into his soul, spirit, or heart.”<sup>157</sup> The biblical use of the word “heart” is different than today’s English usage. In the Bible, “heart” represents every aspect of man’s nature, including the intellect, will, and emotions. Because man’s heart is spiritually dead, blind, deaf, and totally depraved, only an act of God upon the *whole nature* of man is sufficient to draw him in a God-ward direction. This change is somewhat mysterious. Clearly it does not involve a metaphysical change in man’s being. That is, his substance or essence is not changed. Furthermore, it does make a person sinless or perfect. Even the best Christians, such as the apostle Paul, had to struggle against sin and temptation (Rom. 7:15, 25). In an instantaneous act, the Holy Spirit implants in man the principle of a new, spiritual life.

All the words used in the Bible to describe regeneration show us that there are two primary aspects of regeneration: purification and renewal. The internal purification of the sinner is represented by the terms and phrases “born of water” (Jn. 3:5), “the washing of regeneration” (Tit. 3:5), “I will sprinkle clean water...I will cleanse you” (Ezek. 36:25), “the circumcision made without hands” (Col. 2:11), and the removal of the “heart of stone” (Ezek. 36:26). This aspect is essentially negative. The heart must be purified from the defilement of sin. Sprinkling with water and the washing with water in the Old Testament symbolically represented God’s internal purification of the sinner. Circumcision also symbolized the removal of the filth of the flesh. Men need a circumcision of the heart (cf. Dt. 10:16; 30:6; Lev. 26:41; Jer. 9:26). The removal of the heart of stone represents the removal of the natural man’s unresponsiveness to divine truth. Before one plants a garden, the soil must first be prepared. The weeds, thornbushes, hardpan and stones must first be removed before planting the seed. Likewise, the Holy Spirit must change man’s heart before the gospel can take root and grow. “Our natural hearts are hearts of stone. The word of God is good seed sown on the hard, trodden, macadamized highway, which the horses of passion, the asses of self will, the wagons of imaginary treasure, have made impenetrable. Only the Holy Spirit can soften and pulverize this soil.”<sup>158</sup>

The positive aspect of regeneration is the spiritual renovation of man’s heart. The scriptural terms and phrases used to describe the renovatory aspect are “born again” (Jn. 3:3),

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<sup>157</sup> Edwin H. Palmer, *The Holy Spirit: His Person and Ministry* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, [1974] 1958), 81.

<sup>158</sup> Denovan, quoted in Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1909), 3:819.

“regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Tit. 3:5), “made alive” or “quicken” (Eph. 2:5), and “born of the Spirit” (Jn. 3:5-6). The regenerated person is called a “new creation” (Gal. 6:15; 2 Cor. 5:17) and a “new man” (Eph. 4:24). This aspect is represented in the heart of stone becoming a heart of flesh (Ezek. 32:2) and the uncircumcised heart becoming a circumcised heart (Col. 2:11). All the terms used to describe the renovatory aspect of regeneration point to the impartation of spiritual ability, life and enlightenment. Shedd wrote, “Regeneration as the creative and life giving act of God produces an effect on the human *understanding*. It is ‘illumination’: ‘enlightening the mind,’ Westminster L.C., 67.... ‘The eyes of your understanding being enlightened,’ Eph. 1:18. Phil 1:9. Coloss. 3:10. I John 4:7; 5:20. John 17:3. Ps. 19:7, 8; 43:3, 4. The distinguishing peculiarity of the knowledge produced by regeneration is, that it is experimental.”<sup>159</sup>

### **The Unwilling Are Made Willing**

The reason that God’s grace is effectual or irresistible is that the Holy Spirit imparts an inclination to holiness in the human heart. Man’s heart is changed in such a way that the unwilling become willing. The person who is regenerated by the Holy Spirit embraces Jesus Christ because he *wants* to. Shedd wrote, “In the Scripture phraseology, he is ‘made willing,’ Ps. 110:3. God ‘works in him to will,’ Phil. 2:13. In the phraseology of the Westminster statement (L.C., 67), he is ‘powerfully determined.’ By renewing the sinful and self-enclaved will, the Holy Spirit empowers it to self-determine or incline to God as the chief good and the supreme end.”<sup>160</sup> The old heart which hated Jesus Christ and considered spiritual matters to be foolishness (1 Cor. 2:14) is replaced with a new heart which is spiritual, which is deeply concerned about spiritual affairs. After a person is regenerated, Christ becomes the most important person in his life. The Savior becomes to him like a hidden treasure and a pearl of great price (Mt. 13:44, 46). Because the heart is made spiritual it desires and loves “the things of the Spirit.” “For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you” (Rom. 8:6-9). God doesn’t put a gun to man’s head and coerce him into the kingdom; rather, He changes him internally so that he voluntarily chooses Christ.<sup>161</sup> The human will *always* acts in accordance with the human heart.

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<sup>159</sup> William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1889), 2:495. “These elements, the purificatory and the renovatory, must not be regarded as separable events. They are simply aspects which are constitutive of this total change by which the called of God are translated from death to life and from the kingdom of Satan into God’s kingdom, a change which provides for all the exigencies of our past condition and the demands of the new life in Christ, a change which removes the contradiction of sin and fits the fellowship of God’s Son” (John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955], 100).

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:499.

<sup>161</sup> “The special grace which we refer to as efficacious is sometimes called irresistible grace. This latter term, however, is somewhat misleading, since it does suggest that a certain overwhelming power is exerted upon the person, in consequence of which he is compelled to act contrary to his desires, whereas the meaning intended, as we have stated before, is that the elect are so influenced by divine power that their coming is an act of voluntary choice” (Boettner, *Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 178).

## Effectual Calling

Regeneration, in its strictest sense, refers solely to the Holy Spirit's work in the subconscious life of man: "by a creative word God generates the new life, changing the inner disposition of the soul, illuminating the mind, rousing the feelings, and renewing the will. In this act of God the ear is implanted that enables man to hear the call of God to the salvation of his soul."<sup>162</sup> Regeneration in its broadest sense refers to what occurs when the regenerated heart comes in contact with the gospel and the Holy Spirit effectively applies God's word to the mind. "Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever" (1 Pet. 1:23). "Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures" (Jas. 1:18). With regeneration the dead sinner is quickened, enabled and disposed toward divine truth. However, not only is the person regenerated by God enabled and made willing, he also is *actively* drawn toward the truth. Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me *draws* him" (Jn. 6:44). Hendriksen wrote,

When Jesus refers to the divine drawing activity, he employs a term which clearly indicates that more than moral influence is indicated. The Father does not merely beckon or advise, he *draws*! The same verb *elko, elkuo* occurs also in 12:32, where the activity is ascribed to the Son; and further, in 18:10; 21:6, 11; Acts 16:19; 21:30; and Jas. 2:6. The drawing of which these passages speak indicates a very powerful—we may even say, an irresistible—activity. To be sure, man resists, but his resistance is ineffective. It is in that sense that we speak of God's grace as being irresistible. The net full of big fishes is actually drawn or dragged ashore (21:6, 11). Paul and Silas are dragged into the forum (Acts 16:19). Paul is dragged out of the temple (Acts 21:30). The rich drag the poor before the judgment-seats (Jas. 2:6). Returning now to the Fourth Gospel, Jesus will draw all men to himself (12:32) and Simon drew his sword, striking the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear (18:10). To be sure, there is a difference between the drawing of a net or a sword, on the one hand, and of a sinner, on the other. With the latter God deals as with a responsible being. He powerfully influences the mind, will, heart, and entire personality. These, too, begin to function in their own right, so that Christ is accepted by a living faith. But both at the beginning and throughout the entire process of being saved, the power is ever from above; it is very real, strong, and effective; and it is wielded by God himself!<sup>163</sup>

In regeneration in the broader sense the implantation of the incorruptible seed, the changing of the heart, the drawing power of the triune God, and the external call of the gospel all come together and give birth to the converted soul. Except in the case of elect infants, elect imbeciles, and John the Baptist (Lk. 1:41-44) regeneration always accompanies either the

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<sup>162</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 471.

<sup>163</sup> William Hendriksen, *John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953), 1:238-239. "Here is a fundamental doctrine of the Fourth Gospel, viz. that the approach of the soul to God or Christ is not initiated by the man himself, but by a movement of Divine grace' (Bernard). Barclay gives a number of examples of the use of the verb *elkuo* in the New Testament to show that 'Always there is this idea of resistance.' This is surely true, and indicates that God brings men to Himself although by nature they prefer sin. But curiously Barclay adds, 'God can and does draw men, but man's resistance can defeat the pull of God.' Not one of his examples of the verb shows the resistance as successful. Indeed we can go further. *There is not one example in the New Testament of the use of this verb where the resistance is successful.* Always the drawing power is triumphant, as here. Calvin speaks of 'an effectual movement of the Holy Spirit, turning men from being unwilling and reluctant into willing'" (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971], 371, Emphasis added).

preached word, the written word, or an intellectual knowledge of the gospel held in the mind received in the past. There are people who hear or read the gospel who immediately are regenerated and saved, and there are people who hear the gospel for years and know it intellectually but who are not saved until the Holy Spirit comes and opens their eyes spiritually. There are examples of people who were raised in godly Christian homes who had memorized many Scripture passages and the Shorter Catechism, who had an excellent intellectual grasp of the gospel but who were not regenerated and thus did not believe until their mid-twenties. God sovereignly controls not only who is and who is not saved, but also the exact time a person is converted.

## God Receives All the Glory

The biblical doctrine of regeneration teaches that not only what Christ has accomplished *for us* objectively through His sinless life and atoning death is a free gift of God, but also what the Holy Spirit accomplishes *in us* subjectively (regeneration and its fruits) is a free gift of God. Salvation, from start to finish, is a work of God. If faith in Christ and repentance are something that man can do *apart* from regenerating grace, then salvation is not wholly a work of God. Those who believed in Christ and repented by their own power would have reason to boast. They could say, “I was wise enough to choose Christ, I was moral enough to repent.” But the Bible teaches that regeneration is wholly a work of the Holy Spirit, and that faith and repentance are gifts from God.<sup>164</sup> “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the *gift* of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9). “For it is *God who works in you* both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). “He who *has begun a good work in you* will complete it” (Phil. 1:6). “For to you *it has been granted* on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Phil. 1:29). “Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, *to give repentance* to Israel and forgiveness of sins” (Ac. 5:31). “Then God has also *granted* to the Gentiles *repentance to life*” (Ac. 11:18). “In humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will *grant* them repentance, so that they may know the truth” (2 Tim. 2:25). Those who believe in Jesus Christ do so only because they were ordained—or appointed to—eternal life. Only the elect receive God’s regenerating power. “And as many as *had been appointed* to eternal life believed” (Ac. 13:48).

## Objections

1. The Bible teaches that people are saved when they believe in Jesus Christ. If regeneration logically precedes belief, doesn’t that imply that a person is saved by regeneration rather than by Christ? No, not at all. Regeneration and all the saving graces flow from a vital union between Christ and His people during Christ’s life, death and resurrection. Paul said, “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we

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<sup>164</sup> Faith and repentance are called gifts of God not because God believes for the sinner, but because God enables and causes particular persons to believe. Faith and repentance flow from a regenerate heart. “Regeneration is the act of God and of God alone. But faith is not the act of God; it is not God who believes in Christ for salvation, it is the sinner. It is by God’s grace that a person is able to believe but faith is an activity on the part of the person and of him alone. In faith we receive and rest upon Christ alone for salvation” (John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 106). Furthermore, although the Calvinist teaches a monergistic system of salvation and teaches that man does not contribute one iota to the first stage of regeneration, he does teach that man cooperates in the later stages of redemption.

were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus“ (Eph. 2:4-6). God only regenerates those who were united with Christ in His death and resurrection. The elect are regenerated because they partake of the resurrected life from Christ. Jesus said, “Because I live, you will live also” (Jn. 14:19). “I am the resurrection and the life” (Jn. 11:25). Paul said, “We shall be saved by His life” (Rom. 5:10). “The first man Adam became a living being. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit” (1 Cor. 15:45). “Your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3).

The idea that Christ died and rose for all men without exception, and that Christ is now sitting in heaven waiting to see who chooses Him and who rejects Him is contrary to Scripture. Jesus is in heaven, but He is actively interceding and saving His elect throughout history. “As You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him“ (Jn. 17:2). It is true that a person is not justified until he believes in Christ. But a person will not believe until Christ sends His Holy Spirit to regenerate his heart and enable him to believe. Christ does this only for those who were united to Him in His death and resurrection—the elect. “All the people of Christ are the ‘first born’ children of God, through their union with Him who is The Firstborn *par excellence*.”<sup>165</sup>

2. What about the passages which speak of people who resist the Holy Spirit? Doesn’t this imply that people can successfully resist the grace of God? There is no question that the Bible speaks of people who resist the Holy Spirit. But does this mean that people can successfully resist the Holy Spirit’s *regenerating power*? A brief look at a passage often quoted by Arminians against the Calvinistic doctrine of efficacious grace will prove that the passages which speak of resisting the Holy Spirit have nothing to do with regeneration. “You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you” (Ac. 7:51).

This passage teaches that the resistance made by those Jews was not toward a work of the Holy Spirit *in them*, but to the *external* work of the Spirit. The passage says that these Jews were *not* regenerated. That is exactly what the phrase “uncircumcised in heart and ears” means. Verses 52 and 53 show what is meant by resisting the Holy Spirit. They persecuted and killed the prophets; that is, they emphatically rejected the inspired preaching of Stephen, and also murdered him (v. 59). They betrayed and murdered the Son of God (v. 52). They received the law but did not obey it (v. 53). In verse 51 they are called “stiffnecked.” This word is used of oxen that refuse to obey the command of the master. These Jews had the external covenant sign of circumcision, but they lacked the circumcision of the heart, that is, the internal work of grace. Anyone who resists the preaching of the gospel and refuses to obey it resists the Holy Spirit. They oppose the Holy Spirit who is “the divine author of all revelation whether history or prophecy, doctrine or precept, law or gospel.”<sup>166</sup>

The whole idea that this and other passages teach that the Holy Spirit is working *internally* upon people, attempting to save them, but that they prevent the Spirit from doing so by their own will is most absurd, especially considering the many passages which teach the opposite. The Bible does not teach that the Holy Spirit is working hard to save the non-elect; on the contrary, it says that He hardens them. “Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and *the rest were hardened*. Just as it is written: God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day” (Rom.

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<sup>165</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 377.

<sup>166</sup> J. A. Alexander, *Acts* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1857] 1963), 302.

11:7-8). “Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills *He hardens*” (Rom. 9:18).

“For the apostle does not teach that the grace of a good will is bestowed upon us if we accept it, but that He wills to work in us. This means nothing else than that the Lord by his Spirit directs, bends, and governs, our heart and reigns in it as in his own possession, indeed, he does not promise through Ezekiel that he will give a new Spirit to his elect only in order that they may be able to walk according to his precepts, but also that they may actually so walk [Ezekiel 11:19-20; 36:27]” (John Calvin, *Institutes* II:III:10).

## Perseverance of the Saints

One of the doctrines of sovereign grace is the perseverance of the saints. This doctrine refers to the biblical teaching which says that those whom God loved before the foundation of the world and chose in Christ, who are regenerated by the Holy Spirit and truly believe in Jesus Christ as He is presented in the Scriptures, will be preserved by God their entire lives until death, and therefore cannot lose their salvation. They are eternally saved. This does not mean that true believers cannot backslide and commit grievous sins. They sometimes do, but they cannot “totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace.”<sup>167</sup> “It is certain that true believers may fall into very great sins; but yet they shall be recovered and brought again to repentance.”<sup>168</sup>

### God Preserves the Elect

Since the word perseverance has been misunderstood, it should be noted that believers persevere only because God preserves His people. In other words, people are ultimately saved not because of their own efforts at perseverance, but they persevere because of God’s grace. God maintains a believer’s faith, orthodoxy and repentance. The Confession of Faith emphasizes this point: “This perseverance of the saints depends, not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ; the abiding of the Spirit and of the seed of God within them; and the nature of the covenant of grace; from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof.”<sup>169</sup>

It is God’s covenant love, faithfulness and sovereign power which guarantee that none of God’s children will perish. If believers were left by God to their own power, they all would certainly apostatize from the faith. Thomas Ridgely writes, “God is styled ‘the preserver of men’ [Job 7:20], inasmuch as he upholds all things by the word of his power, so that independency on him is inconsistent with the idea of our being creatures; and we have no less ground to conclude that his power maintains the new creature, or that grace which took its rise from him. Should he fail or forsake us, we could not put forth the least act of grace, much less persevere in grace. When man at first came out of the hands of God, he was endowed with a greater ability to stand than any one, excepting our Saviour, has been favoured with since sin entered into the world; yet he apostatized, not from any necessity of nature, but by adhering to that temptation which he

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<sup>167</sup> Westminster Confession of Faith, XIX:1; Larger Catechism, answer to question 79.

<sup>168</sup> Thomas Ridgely, *Commentary on the Larger Catechism* (Edmonton: Still Waters Revival Books, [1855] 1993), 2:167.

<sup>169</sup> Confession of Faith, XIX:2.

might have withstood. Then how unable is he to stand in his present state, having become weak, and, though brought into a state of grace, having been renewed and sanctified only in part, and having still the remains of corruption, which maintain a constant opposition to the principle of grace? Our perseverance in grace, therefore, cannot be owing to ourselves.”<sup>170</sup>

## The Arminian View

The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints logically flows from the doctrines of unconditional election, irresistible grace, total depravity, and limited atonement. If God is sovereign, as the Bible teaches and Calvinists assert, then God can and will preserve those whom He set His infinite and eternal love upon. The Arminian rejects all the doctrines mentioned above, because his whole theological system rotates around the axis of the alleged free will of man. God is said to elect only those who are foreseen to voluntarily accept Christ. Christ is said to have died for all men without exception. They assert that His death has not actually secured or guaranteed the salvation of any one person, but has only made salvation possible to all. Furthermore, they teach that the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit operates equally upon all, and that the reason one person is born again and another is not is simply that one person cooperated with the Holy Spirit, while the other successfully resisted Him. The Arminian makes the Father’s choice of the elect, the redemptive work of the Son, and the application of Christ’s work by the Holy Spirit all contingent upon and limited by man’s free will or voluntary reception of grace. Since man and not God is the one who sovereignly decides who will and who will not be saved, it logically follows that man’s free will also determines who perseveres and who rejects the faith. “The Protestant Arminians also hold that it is not only possible, but also a frequent fact, that persons truly regenerate, by neglecting grace and grieving the Holy Spirit with sin, fall away totally, and at length finally, from grace into eternal reprobation. Conf. of the Remonstrants, xi. 7.”<sup>171</sup> The Arminian “places the cause of his perseverance, not in the hands of an all-powerful, never-changing God, but in the hands of weak sinful man.”<sup>172</sup>

Before moving on to the scriptural and doctrinal proofs for perseverance and the objections to the doctrine, a few serious problems regarding the Arminian system should be noted. First, the Arminian scheme places man’s trust and hope for perseverance and salvation *more* upon man than upon Jesus Christ. Man ultimately must look to himself for salvation. Christ did His part, but if man does not keep his own will in line and keep his own repentance up, he will be lost. The Arminian thus has reason to boast before God: “I persevered but others did not. I made the right choices. I exercised my will righteously, but others did not.” In such a system God must share His glory with sinful man. Note: consistent Arminianism is nothing less than a rejection of salvation by grace alone. Second, if God is not the one who preserves His saints because such preservation would violate man’s free will, then how are the saints in heaven preserved? The Arminian must admit that either God has the power to change a person’s nature and will in heaven to make man incapable of sinning, or that a second fall or rebellion of man against God is possible in the eternal state. If God is capable of controlling man’s will in heaven and preserving the redeemed for eternity, why is He incapable or unwilling to preserve His dear children for their short habitation on earth? Third, how is the Arminian supposed to have peace and not worry (cf. Mt. 6:25 ff.; Phil. 4:6-7) when his eternal destiny is dependent upon his weak,

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<sup>170</sup> Thomas Ridgely, *Commentary on the Larger Catechism*, 2:167.

<sup>171</sup> A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1869] 1992), 234.

<sup>172</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 194.

sinful will? Given the fact that doctrinal and ethical apostasy are quite common in our day, one would think that a self-conscious Arminian would either be wallowing in the pride of self-confidence or be a nervous wreck. “To me such a doctrine has terrors which would cause me to shrink away from it forever, and which would fill me with constant and unspeakable perplexities. To feel that I were crossing the troubled and dangerous sea of life dependent for my final security upon the actings of my own treacherous nature were enough to fill me with a perpetual alarm.”<sup>173</sup> But take comfort, dear Christian: Arminianism is unscriptural! God’s love cannot fail.

In order to understand God’s preservation of His people one must first examine the passages which specifically teach the preservation of the saints—that none of those who belong to Christ can perish. Various doctrines which support perseverance will be examined, then the objections to perseverance will be refuted.

### Passages Which Teach That God Preserves His People

**Psalms 37:28.** “For the Lord loves justice, and does not forsake His saints; they are preserved forever, but the descendants of the wicked shall be cut off.” Plumer writes, “God’s people are surrounded by walls of fire, by a heavenly host, by the infinite care of God. They are *kept* as the apple of God’s eye, Ps. xvii. 8.”<sup>174</sup> “He will preserve them to his heavenly kingdom; that is a preservation for ever, 2 Tim. iv. 18; Ps. 12:7.”<sup>175</sup>

**Psalms 121:3, 7-8.** “He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber.... The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul. The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and forevermore.”

**Jeremiah 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.” In this passage God promises that He will never leave or forsake His people. This verse proves that God works effectually in the elect. God causes His people to persevere by changing their hearts. Real Christians fear God because of the Holy Spirit’s ability to work directly upon the human heart to change it. The Holy Spirit guarantees that true believers will never depart from God. Hodge writes, “The certainty of the perseverance of the saints in grace is secured...by the constant indwelling of the Holy Ghost. He acts upon the soul in perfect accordance with the laws of its constitution as a rational and moral agent, and yet so as to secure the ultimate victory of the new spiritual principles and tendencies implanted in regeneration. John xiv. 16, 17; I John iii. 9.”<sup>176</sup>

**John 17:11.** “Holy Father, keep [from *tereo*, preserve] through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are.” Pink writes, “How this brings out the *value* Christ sets upon us and the deep *interest* He has in us! About to return to the Father on high, He asks the Father that He will preserve those so dear to His heart, those for whom He bled and died. He hands them over to the care of the very One who had first given them to Him. It was as though He said: I know the *Father’s* heart! *He* will take good care of them! And why was it, why

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<sup>173</sup> McFetridge, *Calvinism in History*, quoted in Boettner, 194-195.

<sup>174</sup> W. S. Plumer, *Psalms* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1967] 1990), 455.

<sup>175</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (McLean, VA: MacDonald Pub. Co., n.d.), 3:375.

<sup>176</sup> A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith*, 236.



is it, that we *are* so highly esteemed by Christ? Clearly not for any excellency which there is, intrinsically, in us. The answer must be, Because we are *the Father's love gift to the Son*.”<sup>177</sup>

**Romans 14:4.** “Who are you to judge another’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.” Shedd writes, “It denotes not merely the pronouncement of a favorable judgment, but also support in that course of life and conduct which results in a favorable judgment. The ‘strong’ shall be enabled by God’s grace to stand in faith and obedience, and thereby in the final judgment.”<sup>178</sup>

**Romans 16:25.** “Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ...” “God is able to establish or strengthen believers so that they will not ‘vacillate, and depart from evangelical truth.’”<sup>179</sup>

**1 Corinthians 10:13.** “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.” Hodge writes, “He has promised to preserve his people, and therefore his fidelity is concerned in not allowing them to be unduly tempted. Here, as in 1, 9, and everywhere else in Scripture, the security of believers is referred neither to the strength of the principle of grace infused into them by regeneration, not to their own firmness, but to the fidelity of God.”<sup>180</sup>

**2 Corinthians 9:8.** “And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, have an abundance for every good work.” “The sacred writers often appeal to the power of God as a ground of confidence to his people. Rom. 16, 25. Eph. 3, 20. Jude 24.”<sup>181</sup>

**Ephesians 5:25.** “Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.”

**Philippians 1:6.** “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.” Note that a Christian’s confidence resides not in himself but in God. The work of grace that God has begun in Christians will be brought to

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<sup>177</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, [1945] 1975), 3:119. Arminians try to circumvent this verse (v. 11) by an appeal to verse 12, which says that Judas is lost. The problem with the Arminian interpretation is that Jesus called Judas “the son of perdition” in this same prayer before the betrayal in the next chapter. In other words, Jesus identifies Judas as a reprobate before he apostatized from the visible church. Thus, it is obvious that Judas is not included in the high priestly prayer. Believers are commanded not to pray for reprobates (1 Jn. 5:16). Furthermore, in Jn. 13:18 Jesus says that Judas is not elect, or chosen to eternal life: “I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, ‘He who eats bread with Me has lifted his heel against Me.’” The gospel accounts shows that Judas never received God’s special grace. “Jesus answered them, ‘Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil’” (Jn. 6:70).

<sup>178</sup> William G. T. Shedd, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1879] 1980), 390.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 436

<sup>180</sup> Charles Hodge, *I and II Corinthians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth [1857, 58] 1978), 182.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 596.

completion. What God starts He completes. God can guarantee a believer's preservation, "for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

**I Thessalonians 5:23-24.** "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." Morey writes, "The Apostle places the basis of ultimate salvation upon *the covenantal faithfulness of God*. God's faithfulness was displayed when He effectually called us into union with Christ (I Cor. 1:9). And as God's faithfulness *began* our salvation by calling us, His faithfulness guarantees the ultimate *completion* of our salvation. The Apostle says that God 'will do it,' i.e. He will bring His people to complete sanctification. God's covenantal faithfulness guarantees it."<sup>182</sup>

**2 Thessalonians 3:3.** "But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one."

**2 Timothy 1:12.** "For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless, I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day." Calvin writes, "*What I have entrusted to him*. Observe that he employs this phrase to denote eternal life; for hence we conclude, that our salvation is in the hand of God, in the same manner as there are in the hand of a depository those things which we deliver to him to keep, relying on his fidelity. If our salvation depended on ourselves, to how many dangers would it continually be exposed? But now it is well that, having been committed to such a guardian, it is out of all danger."<sup>183</sup>

**2 Timothy 4:18.** "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!"<sup>184</sup>

**Hebrews 12:2.** "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." Hughes writes, "He alone evokes and stimulates faith; and it is because he is the pioneer of our salvation (Heb. 2:10) that he is the author of our faith. Our faith, moreover, is initiated and sustained by him because he has prayed the Father that we may come to faith (Jn. 17:20 f.) and that our faith may not fail (Lk. 22:31 f.). Thus we look to him as 'the apostle and high priest of our confession' (Heb. 3:1), and we have assurance that he who has begun a good work in us will bring it to completion (Phil. 1:6)."<sup>185</sup>

**1 Peter 1:4-5.** "To an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." Why do Christians have an inheritance which can never be taken

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<sup>182</sup> Robert A. Morey, *Studies in the Atonement* (Southbridge, MA: Crown Publications, 1989), 231.

<sup>183</sup> John Calvin, *2 Timothy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 2:201.

<sup>184</sup> "Since he has mentioned his deliverance 'from the lion's mouth,' Paul wants to state clearly to Timothy that he expects his future deliverance to be heavenward and that this, too, is true deliverance. He speaks, therefore, about the ultimate and final deliverance and, because it is such, uses *sosei* (also in LXX Ps. 21:22) as the appropriate verb. The pregnant construction *sosei eis*, 'bring safely into'..., with 'the heavenly kingdom' as the object of the preposition, implies deliverance from this world with all its evils and from death in all its aspects..." (George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992], 472).

<sup>185</sup> Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 522.

away? Because believers are kept by the power of God. The heir “is guarded by God’s power. What power is greater? Paul makes the same point in Romans 8:38, 39. *Nothing* is more powerful than God. Thus the heir also is utterly secure.”<sup>186</sup>

**Jude 1.** “To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ.”

**Jude 24.** “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....” Thomas Manton writes, “*To him that is able to keep you*, it may be referred either to God, or to Christ as Mediator: *from falling, aptaistous*, that is, from total apostasy. God is able to keep us altogether from sin, if we speak of his absolute power; but he speaketh here of such a power as is engaged by promise and office. Christ, who is the guardian of believers, hath received a charge concerning them, and is to preserve them from total destruction. *And to present you faultless*. This clause showeth more clearly that Christ is intended in these expressions; for it is his office to keep the church till it be presented to the Father, and at length will present them *faultless*; it is, Eph. v. 27, ‘Without spot and blemish.’”<sup>187</sup> Some may wonder: “God is able, but is He willing?” There are many passages which teach that God will keep and preserve His people—every single one of them (e.g., Jer. 32:40; Jn. 6:39; 10:28; 17:2, 11).

### Passages Which Teach That Not One of the Elect Can Be Lost

**Matthew 24:24; Mark 13:22.** “For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect.” The obvious implication of this passage is that it is impossible for a false prophet or false christ to deceive one of the elect. Jesus said that His “sheep hear his voice” (Jn. 10:3); they “follow him, for they know his voice” (Jn. 10:4). But “they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him” (Jn. 10:5). The elect cannot fall into apostasy or any damnable heresy, for “he who is spiritual judges all things” (1 Cor. 2:15). The apostle John says that true believers will not leave the body of Christ because “you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things” (1 Jn. 2:20; cf. 2:27).

**John 6:39.** “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 that last day.” Hendriksen writes, “The doctrine of *the perseverance of the saints* is taught here in unmistakable terms; first negatively, then positively. The *last day* is the judgment day; see on 5:28, 29. The idea is: the elect will be kept and guarded *to the very end*. This doctrine is also taught in 10:28; Rom. 8:29, 30, 38; 11:29; Phil. 1:6; Heb. 6:17; II Tim. 2:19; I Pet. 1:4, 5; etc In these and many other passages, Scripture teaches a counsel that cannot be changed, a calling that cannot be revoked, an inheritance that cannot be defiled, a foundation that cannot be shaken; a seal that cannot be broken, and a life that cannot perish. The doctrine of the preservation (hence, perseverance) of the saints is surely implied in the term *everlasting life*....”<sup>188</sup> This statement of Jesus Christ could not be any clearer. He did not say that many, or some, or a few would be lost, but that *none—not one* would be lost. On that day Jesus will say, “Here am I and the children whom God has given Me” (Heb. 2:13).

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<sup>186</sup> Jay E. Adams, *Trust and Obey: A Practical Commentary on First Peter* (Greenville, SC: A Press, 1978), 14.

<sup>187</sup> Thomas Manton, *Jude* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1658] 1989), 362.

<sup>188</sup> William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 1:235.

**John 10:27-29.** “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand.” There is no stronger passage in the whole Bible which teaches the eternal security of the believer. These sheep belong to Jesus Christ. He gives them eternal life. Since the sheep are in possession of eternal life, it is impossible for them to perish. *Many of God’s saints have backslidden, but not one has ever apostatized.* Jesus promises that no one can take Christ’s sheep from Him: no man, no matter how powerful; no woman, no matter how seductive or beautiful; no demon, and not even Satan himself can snatch one of Christ’s own. Christ even protects us from ourselves. The *no one* is comprehensive. To argue, as Arminians do, that a true sheep can become a goat is to call Christ a liar, and is a denial of the clear teaching of Scripture. Not only are believers secure in the omnipotent hands of Jesus Christ, but believers are also protected by God the Father. It is the Father who gives the elect to the Son. He is just as interested in the believer’s security as is the Son. “The ‘hand of Christ’ (v. 28) is beneath us, and the ‘hand’ of the Father is above us. Thus are we secured between the clasped hands of Omnipotence!”<sup>189</sup> Arminians should note that our perseverance depends not upon our hand holding Christ, but upon Christ holding us. Those who teach that man can tear himself loose from the power of Christ have dethroned God.

### **Inferential Proofs from Other Doctrines**

The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is not only explicitly taught in Scripture, but also logically proceeds from other biblical doctrines. What follows is a brief examination of some of the doctrines which have a direct relationship to God’s preservation of the elect.

#### *1. The Sovereignty of God*

The many passages already considered that prove God’s preservation of His people show that it is God’s sovereign power which protects His sheep. If one accepts the biblical teaching regarding God’s sovereignty, then one must accept the preservation of the saints or reject God’s love toward the elect. Since the Bible teaches that God controls the human heart (Pr. 16:1; 19:21; 21:1; Dt. 2:30; Josh. 11:19-20; Ex. 10:1, 20; Rev. 17:17; etc) and all the circumstances and events that occur in a believer’s life, then it logically follows that a believer could only apostatize from the faith if God wanted him to apostatize.

The Arminian who does not accept God’s absolute control of the human heart still cannot escape from this logical dilemma, for Arminians still believe that God has a perfect foreknowledge of all events. The Arminian would admit that God knows the exact time that a Christian is going to apostatize and the specific events which will lead to the Christian’s apostasy. If God loves His children infinitely more than an earthly father does or could, why would He not take a believer home before he apostatizes? Would it not be better to die of a heart attack, brain aneurysm, or car accident than spend eternity in hell? Also, why would God allow one of His beloved children to enter into a circumstance of life that He knew would lead to eternal destruction? The Arminian can only escape this argument by choosing among three different options, all of which are patently unbiblical. The first option is that God knows the

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<sup>189</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, [1945] 1975), 2:144.

future but is powerless to intervene in human affairs. This option is the old heresy of Deism. The second option is that God's knowledge is finite and bound by time. In other words, God is not responsible because He doesn't know the future. This view is so obviously heretical that no real Christian would even consider it. The third option is that God is sovereign and infallibly knows the future, but doesn't really love His children. He doesn't care if they reject the faith and go to hell. The problem with this view is that the Bible teaches that God loves His people with a perfect, infinite and eternal love. The idea that God would send His only begotten Son to suffer, be tortured, and die an agonizing death on the cross for a person and then not even bother to protect that person (as if God was an unloving and careless Father) borders on blasphemy.

## 2. *God's Covenant Love for the Elect*

The Bible teaches that God's love for the elect does not change and cannot be destroyed. It is God's love for the elect which sent Jesus Christ to the cross and which guarantees that He will not allow any of His children to perish. "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you" (Jer. 31:3). This passage intimates "that the love is that which was from everlasting, his drawing them or bringing them into a converted state being the result of it, it follows that this everlasting love is the same as his eternal purpose or design to save them. Now, if there be such an eternal purpose relating to their salvation, it necessarily [implies] their perseverance."<sup>190</sup>

The apostle Paul says that nothing created can separate the elect from God's love. This obviously includes the human will (unless one believes the unbiblical notion of an eternal pre-existence of souls). Paul wrote, "If God is for us, who can be against us? 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? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?...For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, *nor any other created thing*, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:31-33, 35, 38-39). "The apostle has been comprehensive in the catalogue he gives, and the reason is to establish universality. But this concluding negation is for the purpose of leaving no loophole—no being or thing in the whole realm of created reality is excluded."<sup>191</sup> Thus the elect are totally secure. God's love for them cannot diminish, stop, or turn to hate.

One must understand that God's love is not dependent upon anything in the elect. It is a love that arises from God's own nature and is directed to an undeserving, wicked, unlovely people. "In this was love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 Jn. 4:10). The only reason "we love Him" is that "He first loved us" (1 Jn. 4:19). Paul says in Romans 8:29 that those whom God foreknew or "loved beforehand" are the ones predestined to eternal life. They are called, justified and glorified. This unbreakable chain in a believer's salvation all flows from the love and compassion of the Father. Paul speaks "of distinguishing love that predestinates to a determined end—conformity to the image of His Son. Ephesians 1:4-5 is to the same effect. God chose a people in Christ and in love predestined them unto adoption through Jesus Christ."<sup>192</sup> If God's love for the elect arises from God Himself

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<sup>190</sup> Thomas Ridgely, *Commentary on the Larger Catechism*, 2:168.

<sup>191</sup> John Murray, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 1:334.

<sup>192</sup> John Murray, *The Atonement* (Presbyterian and Reformed, n.d.), 9-10.

and is eternal and immutable, it logically follows that it cannot fail. If His electing and preserving love was dependent upon anything within the creature, then salvation by grace is dead and Christians have reason to boast.

### 3. *The Doctrine of Election*

The doctrine of individual election does *not* mean that certain individuals merely receive some external privileges, or that some people are likely to be saved, or that certain people who cooperate with the influence of the Spirit and persevere will be saved, but that a definite, fixed number of people are chosen to eternal life “according to the good pleasure of His will” (Eph. 1:5). “It is an election unto an end; that is, unto salvation. In working it out God endows believers with such influences as the Holy Spirit as to lead them, not only to accept Christ, but to persevere unto the end and be saved unto the uttermost.”<sup>193</sup> Those elected will be regenerated (Eph. 2:5), justified (Rom. 8:30), holy and without blame (Eph. 1:4), adopted into God’s family (Eph. 1:5) and glorified (Rom. 8:30).

It is true that an elect *nation*, such as Israel, has within it those who are saved and those who do not believe, but individual election unto life means that 100% of those chosen by God will go to heaven. Paul said regarding the elect within Israel: “God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew...at the present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.... Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were hardened” (Rom. 11:2, 5, 7). John wrote, “All that the Father gives me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (Jn. 6:37). To Timothy Paul wrote, “God has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began” (2 Tim. 1:9, cf. Rom. 9:10-23; Eph. 1:3-12; Acts 13:48). Paul said that the elect are “vessels of mercy which He prepared beforehand for glory” (Rom. 9:23). The end of the elect is glory and not destruction.

### 4. *The Work of the Holy Spirit in Believers*

A study of the work of the Holy Spirit in believers will prove that those regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit cannot totally fall away and perish. A biblical understanding of regeneration leads to a biblical view of perseverance. The apostle John wrote, “Whoever has been born of God does not sin [present continuous tense]...because he has been born of God” (1 Jn. 3:9). “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world” (1 Jn. 5:4). Peter said that Christians have “been born again, not of corruptible [perishable] seed but incorruptible” (1 Pet. 1:23). If the principle of new life in the believer is imperishable, overcomes the world, and prevents him from continuing in a life of sin, then is it not logical to infer that real Christians cannot apostatize or fall short of salvation? Speaking of the Holy Spirit, John wrote, “You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 Jn. 4:4). Matthew Henry writes, “We are born of God, taught of God, anointed of God, and so secured against infectious fatal delusions. God has his chosen, who shall not be mortally seduced.... The Spirit of God dwells in you, and that Spirit is more mighty than men or devils.”<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), 547.

<sup>194</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary* (McLean, VA: MacDonald, n.d.), 6:1082.

Regeneration is a sovereign act of the Holy Spirit upon a person's heart (or whole human nature) in which the soul is made spiritually alive and permanently oriented in a God-ward direction. The spiritual life imparted in regeneration is immortal. Since regeneration is a sovereign act of the Holy Spirit upon man in which man does not cooperate (initiate by an act of the will), only the Holy Spirit can unregenerate a person. Furthermore, even if a person could *unregenerate* himself, he never would, for the regenerate person has a heart of flesh that loves Jesus Christ. Therefore, those who argue that a real Christian can apostatize must also logically argue that the Holy Spirit takes away the heart of flesh from believers and replaces it with a heart of stone. Such a thought is absurd and wicked.

According to Scripture regeneration occurs in all those united to Christ in His life, death, and resurrection (Eph. 2:5-7). Faith and repentance naturally flow from a regenerate heart, and thus are called gifts of God in Scripture (Ac. 5:31; 11:18; Eph. 2:8; Phil. 1:29). If faith is a gift from God and does not arise autonomously in the human heart, then it logically follows that God would have to remove this faith for a believer to apostatize. The Bible declares that God will not abandon His people whom He loved beforehand (Heb. 5:13; Jn. 10:28, 29; 11:26; etc). "Similarly it follows that if a man is not saved by exercising his own [autonomously produced] faith he cannot be lost by ceasing to exercise it. Again this is not merely a logical extension without Scripture to support it, for Scripture tells us plainly that election means God's choice of the individual and not the individual's choice of God (Jn. 15:16); and God is not a man that He should change his mind (Num. 23:19)."<sup>195</sup>

The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit seals believers. "You were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory" (Eph. 1:13-14). If believers are sealed by the Holy Spirit and guaranteed an inheritance, they cannot lose their salvation. In Ephesians 4:30 Paul writes, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." Gordon Clark writes, "He seals us 'to the day of redemption.' *Until* or *for* the day of redemption. Here we have the Calvinistic doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. This or that man in the pew may or may not have been sealed; but if he has been, he will not be finally lost. Regeneration is a once-for-all act. We are not saved at breakfast, lost at noon, and born again in the evening. The phrase 'day of redemption' in this passage is obviously not the day of our regeneration, but the day of full redemption, redemption of the body from the grave, and redemption from sin that will always affect us in our present life."<sup>196</sup>

In the epistle to the Romans Paul taught that the indwelling of the Spirit "secures not only the life of the soul, but also the ultimate and glorious life of the body."<sup>197</sup> "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you" (Rom. 8:11). "Our souls shall live in happiness and glory, because they are renewed: and our bodies too shall be raised up in glory, because they are temples of the Holy Ghost. In the widest sense then it is true, that to be in the Spirit, is to be secure of life and peace."<sup>198</sup> To have the indwelling Spirit of God is to possess life eternal.

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<sup>195</sup> Arthur C. Custance, *The Sovereignty of Grace* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), 197.

<sup>196</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *Ephesians* (Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1985), 162.

<sup>197</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 3:111.

<sup>198</sup> Charles Hodge, *Romans*, 261.

## 5. *The Efficacy of Christ's Redemptive Work*

The Bible teaches that Christ's redemptive work secures the salvation of His people. "You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Mt. 1:21). All the Biblical terms which describe Christ's atoning death make impossible the Arminian idea of an indefinite conditional atonement: expiation means that all the guilt of every sin is forever removed; propitiation means that God's just wrath against sin has been permanently taken away; ransom or redemption refers to the fact that Christ paid the price in *full*; reconciliation means that the enmity between God and the sinner has been removed. The believing sinner is justified. His sins have imputed to Christ on the cross, and Christ's perfect righteousness has been imputed to him. The believer is united to Christ in His life, death and resurrection. Believers are not "under law but under grace" (Rom. 6:14). They are "dead to the law" (Rom. 7:4), "dead to sin" (Rom. 6:2), and "freed from sin" (Rom. 6:2). If the price has been paid in full, if all the guilt of sin is removed, and if a person is clothed with Christ's perfect righteousness, then how can he go to hell? It is clearly impossible.<sup>199</sup>

This, however, does not mean that Christians can claim to be justified and live like the devil for union with Christ in His death and resurrection also secures their salvation from the power of sin. Believers will be sanctified. They definitely will have victory over habitual sin patterns. "Our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.... But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life" (Rom. 6:6, 22). If a believer is perfect before God on account of Christ, and also has definitive sanctification by virtue of union with Him, then obviously he cannot apostatize. "The Lord will perfect that which concerns me. Your mercy, O Lord, endures forever" (Ps. 138:8). "He shall see the travail of His soul, and be satisfied" (Isa. 53:11).

## 6. *The Covenant of Redemption*

The covenant of redemption refers to the agreement made by the persons of the trinity before the creation of the universe regarding the salvation of the elect. The Father chose a people in Christ (Eph. 1:4) and agreed to give them to the Son as a reward for His obedience and suffering. The Son agreed to come to earth to meet all the legal obligations for the elect by His sinless life and sacrificial death. The Holy Spirit agreed to apply Christ's perfect work of redemption to the elect. "Christ speaks of promises made to Him before His advent, and repeatedly refers to a commission which He had received from the Father, John 5:30, 43; 6:38-40; 17:4-12. And in Rom. 5:12-21 and I Cor. 15:22 He is clearly regarded as a representative head, that is, as the head of a covenant."<sup>200</sup> Christ emphasized that He came to do the Father's will. The Bible also teaches that as the divine-human mediator He would receive a reward for

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<sup>199</sup> "Can it be imagined, that God should accept of the righteousness of His Son, and express a well-pleas'dness in it, because by it his law is magnified and made honourable; and that he should impute it to his people, and give them faith to receive it, and plead it as their justifying righteousness; and yet, after all, suffer them to perish? Nay, where could this be justice, to punish those for whose sins Christ has made satisfaction, and God himself has discharged upon it? It is not consistent with the justice of God to punish sin twice; once in the surety, and again in those he has redeemed; which must be the case, if any for whom Christ suffered should perish eternally; for to perish eternally is the same as to be punished with everlasting destruction" (John Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* [Streamwood, IL: Primitive Baptist Library, (1815) 1977], 407).

<sup>200</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 266.



His perfect obedience. “Moreover, in John 17:5 Christ claims a reward, and in John 17:6, 9, 24 (cf. also Phil. 2:9-11) He refers to His people and His future glory as a reward given Him by the Father.”<sup>201</sup>

The idea that the Father has promised the Son the elect as a gift renders impossible the doctrine that true believers can eternally perish. Custance writes, “The statement of the Lord Himself, ‘My Father who gave them to Me’ (John 10:29), is the starting point. The fact that we are the gift of the Father to the Son, a circumstance that implies we are in some special way God’s possession even before we come to the Son, is constantly reaffirmed by the Lord Himself. It seems to be the starting point of his special concern in what is truly the ‘Lord’s Prayer’ in John 17 (especially v. 6). And that we are gifts of the Father to the Son is repeated again and again in John’s gospel: 6:37, 44, 65; 10:28, 29; 17:2, 6, 9, 11, 12, 24; and in many other places. No giver can make a gift of that which is not already his to give. And is it conceivable that God can give to the Son such a present unless it is given in perpetuity? Jesus said: ‘This is the Father’s will [the Greek here is the strong word *thelema*, meaning *intention*] who has sent Me, that of all whom He hath given Me I should *lose* nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day’” (Jn. 6:39).<sup>202</sup> “If Christ would lose some of the ones whom the Father gave Him, He would fail to accomplish God’s will (John 6:32, 39).”<sup>203</sup>

### **Additional Arguments for Perseverance**

There are a number of additional reasons given in Scripture which support the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints: 1. The Bible teaches that Christians can have a full assurance of their salvation (Heb. 3:14; 6:11; 10:22; 2 Pet. 1:10).<sup>204</sup> If believers could lose their salvation at any time, Christians could never have such an assurance. 2. Scripture says that believers are united with Christ and are partakers of His Spirit. This union cannot be destroyed, for it is founded upon God’s eternal, unchangeable, electing love. This union means that as long as Christ lives, believers will also live. They are part of His body. 3. God’s word teaches that Christ intercedes as a high priest on behalf of His people (Jn. 17:9-26). Since Christ’s intercessory prayers for the elect are always efficacious (Jn. 11:42; Heb. 7:25), not one of His own can ever be lost. 4. Jesus promised that of all who come to Him, not one would be forsaken or cast away (Jn. 6:37; Heb. 13:5, 6). 5. The illustrations and metaphors used in the Bible to describe real believers all teach permanence. “The saints, even in this world, are compared to a tree that does not wither, Ps. 1:3; to the cedars which flourish on Mount Lebanon, Ps. 92:12; to Mount Zion which cannot be moved, but which abideth forever, Ps. 125:1; and to a house built on a rock, Matt. 7:24. The Lord is with them in their old age, Is. 46:4, and is their guide even unto death, Ps. 48:14, so that they cannot be totally and finally lost.”<sup>205</sup> Given the abundance of scriptural evidence in favor of God’s preservation of His people, it is astounding that the doctrine is rejected by many modern evangelicals.

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Arthur Custance, *The Sovereignty of Grace*, 201.

<sup>203</sup> Robert A. Morey, *Studies in the Atonement*, 234.

<sup>204</sup> 1 John 5:13, “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.” The verb to know is *eidete*; second perfect active subjunctive of *oida*. This means “to know with settled intuitive knowledge” (A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Baker], 4:242. The strong assurance of which John speaks is incompatible with the idea that a true sheep may become a goat at any moment.

<sup>205</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 200.

## Objections to the Doctrine of Perseverance

### *1. It Leads to Carelessness, Indolence and Immorality*

The obvious and most common objection to the doctrine of perseverance is that if people are taught that they cannot lose their salvation, they will lead lives characterized by immorality. People say, “If a believer cannot lose his salvation, why should he bother to attend the means of grace? Why should he work hard at self-examination and personal sanctification?” In order to answer these questions, one should first note the difference between the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints and the popular fundamentalist-evangelical doctrine of “eternal security.” Although many evangelicals believe that genuine Christians can lose their salvation, there are a number of people who teach that Christians cannot lose their salvation. They teach, however, that once a person “accepts Christ” he cannot lose his salvation, *no matter how he behaves*. This interpretation of eternal security arose from the dispensational teaching that a person can receive Christ as Savior while not receiving Him as Lord; that repentance is a doctrine pertaining to the old Jewish dispensation of law and does not apply to the new covenant church (which is a parenthesis in God’s plan). According to this view a person who “made a decision for Christ” could live a lifestyle involving fornication, drunkenness, theft, murder, bestiality, etc, and still be guaranteed a place in heaven. This is the “carnal Christian” heresy. The apostle Paul defines a carnal person as a believer who has a sectarian spirit in the church; *not* a person who has refused to repent and submit to Christ as Lord. This view of eternal security should never be confused with the scriptural doctrine of perseverance.

The doctrine of perseverance takes very seriously all the biblical commands to watchfulness, obedience, sanctification and holiness. The Bible teaches that all those who are justified will also be sanctified. Christ not only saves His people from the guilt of sin, but also from its power. Union with Christ entails both the forgiveness of sin and a lifestyle characterized by holiness. John Murray wrote,

[I]t is utterly wrong to say that a believer is secure quite irrespective of his subsequent life of sin and unfaithfulness. The truth is that the faith of Jesus Christ is *always respective* of the life of holiness and fidelity. And so it is never proper to think of a believer irrespective of the fruits of faith and holiness. To say that a believer is secure whatever may be the extent of his addiction to sin in his subsequent life is to abstract faith in Christ from its very definition and it ministers to that abuse which turns the grace of God into lasciviousness. The doctrine of perseverance is the doctrine that believers *persevere*; it cannot be too strongly stressed that it is the *perseverance* of the saints. And that means that the saints, those united to Christ by the effectual call of the Father and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, will persevere unto the end. If they persevere, they endure, they continue. It is not at all that they will be saved irrespective of their perseverance or their continuance, but that they will assuredly persevere. Consequently, the security that is theirs is inseparable from their perseverance. Is this not what Jesus said? “He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.”<sup>206</sup>

The dispensationalist doctrine of eternal security is based on a faulty understanding of the relationship between justification and sanctification. It is argued that any requirement of holiness on the believer’s part for perseverance is a mixing of faith and works to attain eternal life.

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<sup>206</sup> John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 154-155.

Calvinists are accused of rejecting justification as a once-and-for-all act of God in favor of justification by a process that involves perseverance.<sup>207</sup> This interpretation of the Calvinist's position is totally off the mark. Following the Scriptures Calvinists teach that justification is a once-for-all judicial act of God which cannot be annulled and is never to be repeated. But once a person is justified, he immediately begins a lifelong process of sanctification. Sanctification and growth in holiness and perseverance do not contribute one iota to a person's salvation. However, if a person claims to be a Christian yet is not sanctified and does not persevere, then that person was never really a Christian. He was never born again or justified. He was a hypocrite, a false professor who merely had a bare intellectual assent to certain propositions but who never truly trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation. "It is not enough to *profess* Christ. You must actually and really *possess* Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour in order to be truly saved."<sup>208</sup> The same Jesus who preached justification by faith alone (Jn. 5:24; Lk. 18:9-14; 23:43) also said "You shall know them by their fruits" (Mt. 7:16). Paul said, "Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are his,' and, 'Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity'" (2 Tim. 2:19).

The charge that perseverance leads to carelessness and indolence shows an ignorance of the relationship between predestination and personal responsibility. God predestinates the end, but also the means to an end. Furthermore, although God is in control of "whatsoever comes to pass," man is a valid secondary agent and is fully responsible for his actions. Scripture gives many examples of godly men who were told what would happen in the future; yet these same men were exceedingly diligent in working toward that promised end. "Joshua, though he was assured that not a man should be able to stand before him, but all his enemies should be conquered by him; this did not make him secure, nor hinder him from taking all the proper precautions against his enemies; and of making use of all means to obtain a victory over them. Hezekiah, though he was assured of his restoration from his disorder; yet this did not hinder him,

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<sup>207</sup> Dispensationalist author Laurence M. Vance writes, "The Calvinist demands holiness to demonstrate election, which then substantiates salvation. This makes salvation a process instead of an instantaneous act.... The Perseverance of the Saints fosters nothing but pride and envy.... The Calvinistic heresy of the Perseverance of the Saints has only recently surfaced among modern Fundamentalists and Evangelicals under the synonym of lordship salvation.... One of the more extreme examples of the fallacy of lordship salvation is the denial that one can be a carnal Christian.... If a man's salvation depends on his perseverance then his Total Depravity couldn't possibly become Total Inability, for then he would not be able to persevere. If a man's salvation depends on his perseverance then he could never be the subject of Unconditional Election, for salvation would be conditional. If a man's salvation depends on his perseverance, a Limited Atonement was a failure, for some of the 'elect' may not persevere long enough to benefit from it. If a man's salvation depends on his perseverance, Irresistible Grace could never have been applied, for the grace of God would prove to be resistible" (*The Other Side of Calvinism* [Pensacola, FL: Vance Pub., 1991], 335-337, 339-341). Vance totally misrepresents the Calvinistic doctrine of salvation and perseverance. No Calvinist believes that perseverance contributes to one's salvation. Repentance, perseverance and a life of godly living do not contribute one iota to salvation but are evidence that the instantaneous act of justification has already taken place. Vance also completely ignores the fact that it is God who enables a Christian to persevere. "For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). His whole argument that perseverance destroys the other four points of Calvinism is based on the faulty assumption that man perseveres by his own power and not solely because of God's grace. He also ignores the sovereignty of God. Furthermore, if one defines a carnal Christian as does the apostle Paul, who says that a carnal Christian is someone who has a sectarian spirit in the church, then Calvinists believe in such a thing as a carnal Christian. But Dr. Vance and other dispensationalists define a carnal Christian as someone who accepts Christ as Savior, but refuses to accept His lordship. They would argue that a habitual whoremonger, adulterer, sodomite, thief, murderer, or rapist who had accepted Christ still has a place in heaven. This concept of the carnal Christian the Calvinist emphatically rejects (cf. Rom. 6, 7; 1 Jn. 1:6, 2:4-6; 3:3-10, 24; 5:1-5, 18).

<sup>208</sup> Robert A. Morey, *Studies in the Atonement*, 236.

nor the prophet, who assured him of it, from making use of proper means for the cure of it: and though the apostle Paul had a certainty of the saving of the lives of all that were in the ship, yet he directed them to the proper means of their preservation; and told them, that except they abode in the ship they could not be saved; and taking this his advice, though shipwrecked, they all came safe to shore.”<sup>209</sup>

## *2. It Cannot Be Reconciled with the Warnings against Apostasy*

Another objection to perseverance is that since the Bible is full of warnings against apostasy and unbelief, the danger of falling away cannot be imaginary, but must be quite real. Furthermore, are there not many examples of believers who apostatized (e.g., King Saul, Judas Iscariot, Hymenaeus, Alexander, Philetus, and Demas)?

That the Bible is full of admonitions to obey and persevere and warnings against apostasy cannot be denied. There are the many “if” passages. “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word you are My disciples indeed’” (Jn. 8:31). “And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and irreproachable in His sight—if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard” (Col. 1:21-23). “For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end” (Heb. 3:14; cf. Jn. 15:6, 7, 10, 14; Heb. 2:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:1-2).

Jesus spoke regarding those who endure for only a while (Mt. 13:21) and those who are unfruitful because of the deceitfulness of riches (Mt. 13:22). The apostle Paul said: “Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fall, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off” (Rom. 11:21-22). Paul said to Timothy, “by them you may wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck” (1 Tim. 1:18-19). “Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons” (1 Tim. 4:1). In his second letter to Timothy Paul writes, “If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us.... Hymenaeus and Philetus...have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some” (2 Tim. 2:12, 13, 17, 18).

The author of Hebrews also gave stern warnings. “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the good heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame” (Heb. 6:4-6). “For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins” (Heb. 10:26). The author spoke of the “need of endurance” (10:30). The Israelites who did not endure but disbelieved and disobeyed and thus fell in the wilderness are set forth as a warning to the new covenant church (cf. Heb. 3:16-4:6; 1 Cor. 10:1-12). After the same illustration Paul wrote, “Therefore let him who thinks he stand take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).

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<sup>209</sup> John Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* (Streamwood, IL: Primitive Baptist Library, [1815] 1977), 416.

Peter warned the church of the danger of false teachers. “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed” (2 Pet. 2:1-2). Peter even spoke of those who escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of Christ and then returned to their old ways of wickedness. He says it would have better for them if they had never known the way of righteousness (2 Pet. 2:20-22).

The Arminian simply quotes from among these and other related passages and says that it is obvious that believers can, have, and do fall away from the faith. But if real Christians can totally fall away, then are not many well-established doctrines contradicted (i.e. the atonement, God’s sovereignty, unconditional election, irresistible grace, God’s love of the elect, the covenant of redemption, etc)? The Arminian does not really consider these other doctrines a problem, for they have already twisted and perverted them to fit into their system—a system that exalts man’s free will as the ultimate determiner of salvation. What about the numerous passages which clearly teach that real believers *cannot* totally fall away? Arminians either ignore these passages or insist that they must be harmonized with the passages which they claim teach that true believers can apostatize and go to hell. The preservation and perseverance passages must be interpreted as if they are conditioned upon autonomous free human will, even though they appear unconditional. In other words, the plain sense of the preservation-perseverance passages must be altered to fit into the Arminian paradigm.

But, the Arminian will object, doesn’t the Calvinist alter the plain meaning of the passages which speak of Christians falling away? Does he not force these passages into his theological system? Before answering the Arminian objection, a few interpretive issues should be considered. First, one must consider the fact that Scripture cannot contradict Scripture. The Bible cannot teach that real believers can never totally fall away and *also* teach that genuine Christians can apostatize. Second, whenever one encounters a difficult passage, or some passages which appear to contradict other passages, one should use the clearer passages to interpret the less clear. Third, if there are passages that appear to contradict other passages, one should examine other related doctrines to determine which interpretation best harmonizes with Scripture as a whole.

If these procedures are followed, then one must accept the doctrine of the preservation of the saints and reject the Arminian notion that true believers can fall from grace. First, the passages which teach the preservation of the saints could not be clearer. When Jesus says that not one of His people can perish (Jn. 6:39; 10:27-29), how can this mean that some of His people will perish? The Arminian passages are easily explained. In fact, Scripture plainly says that those who apostatize from the faith were never really Christians to begin with (see below). Second, if real sheep could become goats and go to hell, then several crucial Christian doctrines are wrong. Even the doctrine of salvation by grace alone would have to be abandoned in favor of a synergistic method of salvation. Man would have to preserve himself through evangelical obedience.

The Scriptures explain the falling away of professing Christians not in terms of real Christians losing their salvation, but as false faith or unbelief becoming evident. John wrote, “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us” (1 Jn. 2:19). John says that these apostates were never “of us.” They were never genuine

believers. They never really belonged to Christ or the invisible church. “Their presence in the visible church was temporary, for they failed in their perseverance. If they had been members of the invisible church, they would have remained with the body of believers.”<sup>210</sup> John also says that real believers have an anointing from the Holy Spirit and thus cannot be deceived by damnable heresies; they will remain in Christ (1 Jn. 2:21, 27).

When the author of Hebrews described the Israelites who apostatized in the wilderness, who did not enter the promised land because of disobedience (Heb. 4:6), he said that their problem was that they did not believe (Heb. 3:19). In the parable of the sower (Mt. 13:3-23; Mk. 4:1-20) Jesus described four types of ground unto which the good seed of the gospel fell, but it was only the good ground that produced fruit. Only the regenerated heart had true saving faith. The other three had a counterfeit faith. When Paul said that the natural branches of the olive tree were broken off (i.e. national Israel), he specifically said that they were broken off because of unbelief (Rom. 11:20). A study of the passages often quoted by Arminians reveals that those who apostatized had the benefit of external gospel privileges as members of the visible church, but they never were regenerated and never had true saving faith. In not one of the passages which discuss apostates does it say that they were regenerated, justified or adopted.

The Calvinist has never denied the possibility and the reality of people apostatizing and being excommunicated from the visible church, for the visible church is made up of genuine believers and hypocrites, of wheat and tares, of sheep and goats, of the elect and non-elect. There are many people who profess faith in Christ, are baptized, partake of the Lord’s supper, sit under the preaching of the word, and outwardly reform their lives, but as time progresses prove themselves to be self-deceived hypocrites. This common occurrence, however, does not prove that genuine believers can fall away. Furthermore, since no one knows the human heart, everyone in the visible church must be treated as a genuine believer until he proves himself otherwise.

When the apostle Peter discusses false teachers who apostatize and return to the world, he does not say that Christ removed the guilt of their sins, but that they for a time “escaped the pollutions of the world” (2 Pet. 2:20). That is, they had an external reformation of behavior based on what they knew of the gospel. Peter indicates that these teachers were never really regenerate. He says, “But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘a dog returns to his own vomit,’ and ‘a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire’” (2 Pet. 2:22). A dog and a pig act according to their own nature. One can wash a pig and make it clean, but a pig is a pig. It will return to wallowing in the mud—in disgusting filth—because that is what pigs do. Likewise, people who apostatize, who return to their former lifestyle, prove that they were never regenerated by the Holy Spirit because their natures were never changed. “If we could see the real motives of their hearts, we would discover that at no time were they ever activated by a true love of God. They were all this while goats, and not sheep, ravening wolves, and not gentle lambs.”<sup>211</sup>

Perhaps the Scripture most commonly used by Arminians to try to prove the apostasy of genuine believers is Hebrews 6:4-6. Although this is a difficult passage, a brief consideration of it within its context will prove that it does not support the Arminian position and contradict the rest of Scripture. The problem that the author of the book of Hebrews was dealing with involved Jews who joined the Christian assembly for a time and then returned to Pharisaical Judaism. They are said to “crucify the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame” (6:6). By going

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<sup>210</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker, *James and I-III John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 277.

<sup>211</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 192.

back to the Pharisaical religion these Jews totally repudiated Jesus Christ; they joined forces with those who persecuted the church—the religious leaders responsible for Christ’s arrest, torture and execution. It is noteworthy that the author of Hebrews does not refer to these apostates as “us” or even as “you,” but as “those.” Note also that as soon as the section dealing with these apostates ends, the writer sets up a contrast between the real and the counterfeit: “But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, things that accompany salvation” (v. 9).<sup>212</sup>

When the author says that these apostates “were once enlightened” (v. 4), he simply means that they had been instructed in gospel doctrine. They had at best an intellectual understanding of the gospel. They “tasted of the heavenly gift” (v. 4). Gill wrote, “*tasting* of it, stands opposed to eating his flesh and drinking his blood, which is proper to true believers, who feed upon him, internally receive him, and are nourished by him; while hypocrites, and formal professors, only *taste* of him, have a superficial knowledge of him, and gust [taste] for him.”<sup>213</sup> This interpretation becomes evident when one considers that these Jewish apostates “resorted once again to the old sacrificial system and thus demonstrated their lack of any saving faith and of any true comprehension of the role the Lord Jesus had played as the lamb of God.”<sup>214</sup>

But what did the author mean when he said, “...and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit” (v. 4)? This likely means that these professors had the benefit of sharing in the miraculous workings of the Holy Spirit common in the church services during the first generation of believers. The Greek word “partakers” could be translated “sharers.” These false professors saw the healings, heard the prophecies, etc Pink wrote, “It should be pointed out that the Greek word for ‘partakers’ here is a different one from that used in Col. 1:12 and 2 Peter 1:4, where real Christians are in view. The word here simply means ‘companions,’ referring to what is external rather than internal.... These apostates had never been ‘born of the Spirit’ (John 3:6), still less were their bodies His ‘temples’ (I Cor. 6:19).”<sup>215</sup>

That the author of Hebrews in this portion of Scripture does *not* teach that real Christians can totally fall away is also evident from the following. First, the church is told that it is *impossible* to renew those who fall away “again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame” (v. 6). This cannot refer to Christians who fall into grievous sins, for the New Testament gives examples of believers who

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<sup>212</sup> John Brown wrote of verse 9 and following: “The general meaning of this paragraph, all the parts of which are closely connected together, plainly is: ‘The reason why I have made these awful statements about apostates, is not that I consider you whom I am addressing as apostates; for your conduct proves that this is not your character, and the promise of God secures that their doom shall not be yours; but that you may be stirred up to preserving steadiness in the faith, and hope, and obedience of the truth, by a constant continuance in which alone you can, like those who have gone before you, obtain, in all their perfection, the promised blessings of the Christian salvation.’ The reason why the Apostle had stated so particularly the aggravated guilt and all but hopeless condition of apostates, was not that he considered the Hebrew Christians whom he was addressing as in a state of apostasy. No, he was persuaded better things of them—‘things accompanying salvation’” (*Hebrews* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, (1862) 1983], 306).

<sup>213</sup> John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth* (Streamwood, IL: Primitive Baptist Library, [1735-37] 1978), 56.

<sup>214</sup> Arthur C. Custance, *The Sovereignty of Grace*, 220.

<sup>215</sup> Arthur Pink, *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1954] 1981), 291. “Early apostolic history has a record of one outstanding character who believed when he heard the gospel, was baptized, attached himself to the evangelist whose preaching had convinced him...yet Simon Magus was pronounced by Peter to be still ‘in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity’ (Acts 8:9 ff., 18 ff.), and showed himself in the following decades to be the most determined opponent of apostolic Christianity” (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964], 121-122). On the day of judgment Christ will cast many into hell who made an outward profession of faith. Note that these false Christians claim to have prophesied, cast out demons, and done many wonders (Mt. 7:22), yet Christ says to these hypocrites, “I never knew you” (Mt. 7:23). They never had a saving relationship to Christ.

fell and were restored (e.g., Peter, and the repentant Corinthian, 2 Cor. 2:5-10). It refers to professors who totally reject the doctrines of Christianity and thus call Christ a liar, an imposter. If a person was a church member, tasted the sacrament, tasted the word of God and then went back to Judaism, or Islam, or Hinduism, he would be putting Christ to an open shame. Can a real Christian blaspheme Jesus, spit in His face, and call Him an imposter? Certainly not! Paul wrote, “no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed” (1 Cor. 12:3). “To call him anathema is to declare and avow that he was justly crucified as an accursed person, as a public pest. This was done by these persons who went over to the Jews, in approbation of what they had done against him.”<sup>216</sup>

Second, the illustration at the end of the section on apostasy (Heb. 6:7 ff.) confirms the interpretation that apostates were never genuine believers. The rain falling upon the earth is a figurative way of describing the word of God being taught to a group of people. These people have the benefit of sitting under the means of grace. But among those who hear the word, there are two very different responses. One group of people bears useful herbs (v. 7), while another produces thorns and briars “whose end is to be burned” (v. 8). Jesus said, “You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them” (Mt. 7:16-20). The reason some people bear bad fruit is that they were never regenerate. They are bad. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (Jn. 3:6). On the other hand, those who are regenerate cannot produce bad fruit. “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” (1 Jn. 3:9).

But if Christians cannot fall away or apostatize, why are there so many warnings against it?<sup>217</sup> Although the Bible teaches that God is faithful and will preserve His people, this does not mean that God does so apart from the use of secondary causes. The warnings and threats found in the New Testament are used by the Holy Spirit to motivate believers unto a greater diligence, watchfulness, effort, and faithfulness toward God. Perseverance is perseverance in holiness and faith. Berkouwer writes, “For what is striking about the Scriptures is that the passages

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<sup>216</sup> John Owen, *Works* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1850-53] 1979), 7:51.

<sup>217</sup> One passage of Scripture often used by Arminians against the doctrine of perseverance is Rev. 3:5, “He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.” It is assumed by some that this passage teaches the possibility that God will blot out some of the names written in the book of life. This assumption, however, is not at all warranted by the text. The passage does not say that the elect can have their names removed from the book of life. It says that those who overcome will not have their names removed. Who are those who overcome? As noted in this chapter on perseverance, the Bible clearly teaches that only the elect, or real believers, will overcome or persevere. (This is also implicitly taught in the book of Revelation itself: Rev. 13:9 says that those who do not have their names written in the book of life are the only ones who worship the beast [Rev. 17:8].) If the Bible says that all true Christians will overcome and that not one can be lost, then Rev. 3:5 teaches the perseverance of the saints. John Gill wrote, “And I will not blot out his name out of the book of life” by which is meant the choice of persons to everlasting life and salvation; and this being signified by a book, and by writing names in it, shows the exact knowledge God has of his elect, the value he has for them, his remembrance of them, his love to them, and care for them; and that this election is of particular persons by name, and is sure and certain; for those whose names are written in it shall never be blotted out, they will always remain in the number of God’s elect, and can never become reprobates, or shall ever perish; because of the unchangeableness of the nature and love for God, the firmness of his purposes, the omnipotence of his arm, the death and intercession of Christ for them, their union to him, and being in him, the impossibility of their seduction by false teachers, and the security of their persons, grace, and glory in Christ” (*Exposition of the New Testament* [Streamwood, IL: Primitive Baptist Library, [1809] 1979], 9:709).



concerning the steadfastness of God's faithfulness and the passages with admonitions are inseparable. We do not encounter a single passage that would allow anyone to take the immutability of the grace of God in Christ for granted.... The continuance of God's grace cannot be associated with taking things for granted or with passivity."<sup>218</sup> "We believe and pray knowing that our preservation depends entirely upon God's covenantal faithfulness while, at the same time, striving for and seeking after holiness as if our perseverance depended entirely on our own faithfulness to the Lord."<sup>219</sup> When a Christian examines the passages which speak of the fearful consequences of rejecting Christ, the torments of the lake of fire, the day of judgment, and God's thunderbolts of wrath upon the wicked in history, he ought to be all the more diligent to make his calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10). Gill concurs: "these prohibitions of sin, and motives to holiness, are used by the Spirit of God as a means of perseverance; and so they are considered by good men. And it would be absurd and irrational to judge otherwise; for can a man believe he shall persevere to the end, and yet indulge himself in sin, as if he was resolved not to persevere? And nothing can be more stronger motives to holiness and righteousness, than the absolute and unconditional promises of God to his people; and the firm assurance given them of their being the children of God, and the redeemed of the Lamb."<sup>220</sup>

The warnings to persevere and work hard at sanctification serve many purposes. First, they stand as explicit warnings and condemnations to those who apostatize and are cut off from the visible church. God has seen fit to give special warnings to those who profess the true religion and then depart from it. Second, when true believers backslide and fall into grievous sins, they ought to lose all assurance of salvation. These passages regarding apostasy should strike terror into the hearts of all backsliders. These fears are not only used to keep believers from falling away, but they also serve to drive stray sheep back to the fold. Third, these threats stand as a sergeant over his troops, calling them to diligence during a time of great warfare. The Christian life is not static. The trials, temptations, tests and battles of life need such sober exhortations. Fourth, they are a call to humility and prayer. Since it is God who enables His people to persevere, one is continually cast upon Him and His promises. The fact that Christians are promised success should make them all the more sober and diligent.

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[HOME PAGE](#)

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<sup>218</sup> G. C. Berkhouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: Faith and Perseverance* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 97.

<sup>219</sup> Robert A. Moray, *Studies in the Atonement*, 236.

<sup>220</sup> John Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* (Streamwood, IL: Primitive Baptist Library, [1815] 1977), 416. "God's exhortations to duty are perfectly consistent with His purpose to give sufficient grace for the performance of these duties. In one place we are commanded to love the Lord our God with all our heart; in another, God says, 'I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes.' Now either of these must be consistent with each other, or the Holy Spirit must contradict Himself. Plainly it is not the latter" (Lorraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 196).





